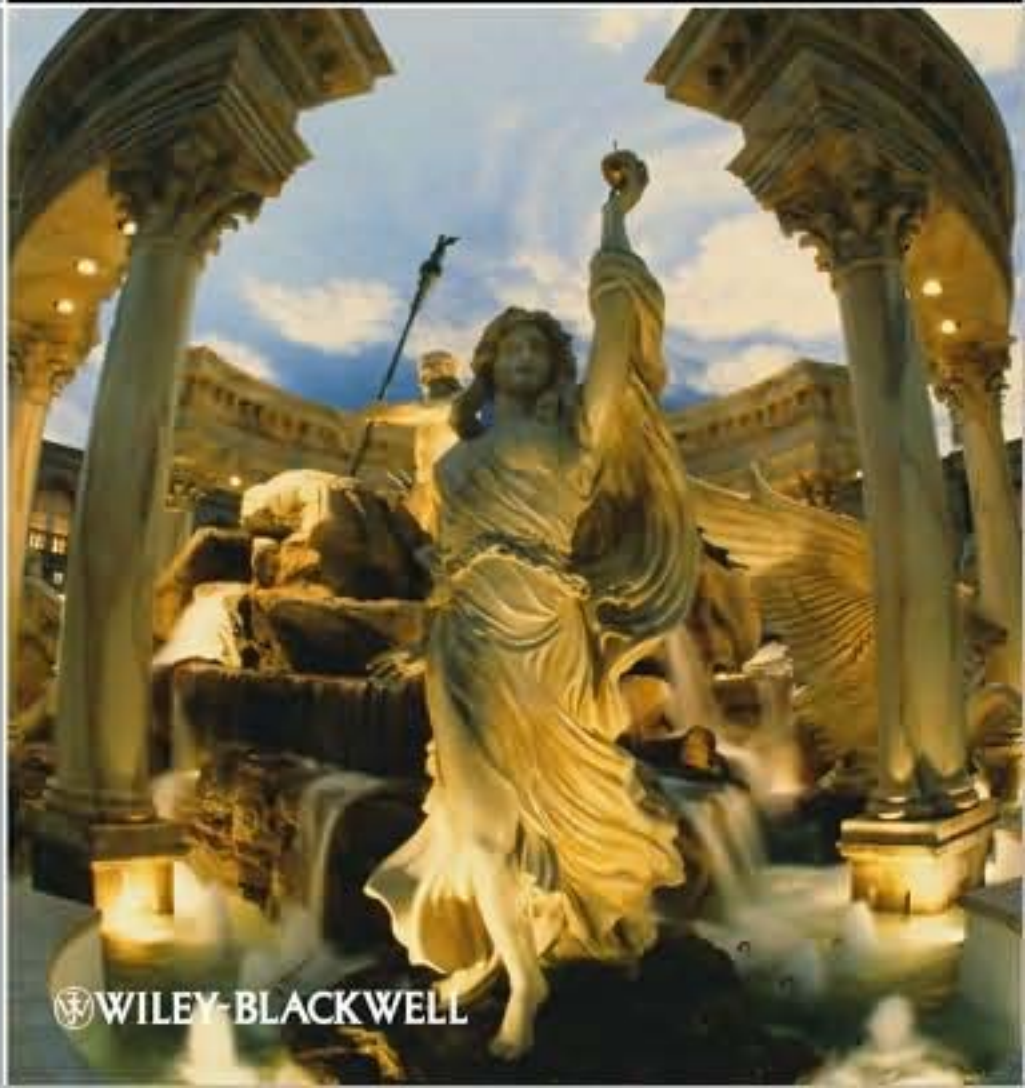
MARGARET MALAMUD

ANCIENT ROME AND MODERN AMERICA



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Ancient Rome and Modern America

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Margaret Malamud

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and chapter 8 appeared as "Cold War Romans" in *Arion* 14/3 (2007): 121–53. Earlier versions of what became chapter 9 appeared as "As the Romans did? Theming ancient Rome in contemporary Las Vegas," *Arion* 6/2 (1998): 11–39, and "Living like Romans in Las Vegas: The Roman world at Caesars Palace, 1966" (co-written with Donald McGuire) in *Imperial Projections: Ancient Rome in Modern Popular Culture*, eds. S. R. Joshel, M. Malamud, and D. T. McGuire, Jr. (2001), Baltimore: 249–69.

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Introduction

West Virginia Senator Robert C. Byrd takes his responsibilities with the utmost seriousness. He carries a worn copy of the United States Constitution in his breast pocket, regularly brandishing it when making a point on and off the Senate floor. Byrd has been in the Senate since 1958, making him its longest-serving senator. In an era of sound bites, Byrd orates. His speeches are laced with references to classical history, frequently quoting the great Roman orator Cicero and the Roman historian Tacitus. His allusions to Rome are nearly always warnings to his colleagues against repeating Rome's slide from republican liberty to imperial corruption under the tyranny of the emperors.

Byrd is passionate about the study of history and one of his favorite quotes from Cicero is on the importance of understanding the past. "To be ignorant of what happened before you were born is to remain always a child. For what is the worth of human life, unless it is woven into the life of our ancestors by the records of history?"[1] In 2004, when accepting the American Historical Association's inaugural Theodore Roosevelt–Woodrow Wilson Award for Civil Service, Byrd emphasized that "history has not only been my constant, close companion throughout my life, it has also been an inspiration and a guide throughout my career in public service."[2] And no history, Byrd believes, is more relevant to America than Roman history. In speech after speech he cites Roman precedents as warnings about the decline of the American republic. It was his understanding of Roman and American history, Byrd said, that inspired him in opposing the Reagan and both Bush administrations' efforts to grasp more and more power at the expense of the legislative branch.

Between April 19 and October 13, 1993, Senator Byrd delivered 14 one-hour orations on ancient Rome to the Senate. These were published in 1995 as *The Senate of the Roman Republic: Addresses on the History of Roman Constitutionalism*. Byrd called them his "Philippics," the name Cicero gave to his 14 speeches criticizing Mark Antony. The impetus for these speeches was his opposition to

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legislation giving the president authority to veto specific line-items in a spending bill without vetoing the entire bill.

> "What does Roman history have to do with the line-item veto?" Byrd asked rhetorically. "To put it simply and elementally," he answered, "by delivering the line-item veto into the hands of the president, any president, Republican or Democrat or Independent, the United States Senate will have set its foot on the same road to decline, subservience, impotence and feebleness that the Roman Senate followed in its own descent into ignominy, cowardice and oblivion."[3]

In his congressional speeches, he linked the line-item veto with the rise of Julius Caesar and the fall of the Roman Republic. The Senate, he said, "handed to the President just as the Roman Senate handed to Caesar and to Sulla the control over the purse. When the Roman Senate ceded to the dictators and later to the emperors the power over the purse, they gave away the Senate's check on the executive power. They gave away the Senate's check on executive tyranny, and that is what we have done."[4] The result in the United States, Byrd argues, is a weakening of the Senate's authority and an expansion of the power of the executive branch.

How do his colleagues in the Senate view Senator Byrd? Some admire him as a relic of a distant American past. Illinois Senator Barack Obama described his impressions of the senator after he listened to his speech welcoming the 2004 newly elected members of the Senate:

> As he spoke, his voice grew more forceful . . . the dark room seemed to close in on him, until he seemed almost a specter, the spirit of Senates past, his almost fifty years in these chambers reaching back to touch the previous fifty years . . . back to the time when Jefferson, Adams, and Madison roamed through the halls of the Capitol, and the city itself was still wilderness and farmland and swamp.[5]

But according to one senator, many are irritated by Senator Byrd's long speeches, his classical allusions, his posturing, and his delaying tactics. He is "dragging it on and on ad infinitum, which is not necessary. Make your point. Have a vote. And move on. He's not willing to do that. He's from a different school. At some point you have to say, 'Enough is enough.' "[6] Another senator has called Byrd "the weirdest man in the Senate."[7]

It wasn't always so. From the early American republic until well into the twentieth century, members of Congress frequently invoked the example of ancient Rome in their speeches and writings. Senator Robert C. Byrd may seem odd to some of his fellow congressmen but he belongs to a long line of United States politicians – and reformers, political activists, writers, and artists – who have used analogies to and metaphors of the rise and fall of Rome as a way of commenting on and debating the state of the nation.

The narrative of a slide from republican virtue into imperial corruption and decline lies in the works of Roman historians, especially Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus, and it has acquired a mythic and malleable resonance. The myth, in its simplest form, is this: once there was a virtuous Republic of citizen-farmers who embodied *pietas*, a term that encompasses respect for the patriarchal family, selfless devotion to the laws and traditions of the civic order, and reverence for the gods who watched over the affairs of the family and the Republic. Simplicity, sobriety, frugality, and fortitude were all characteristics of good citizens. Republican virtues and military technology and prowess enabled conquest, and soon the Republic acquired an empire. The acquisition of wealth and imperial power brought in its wake corruption, decadence, and a loss of the qualities that had once made the Republic great. The vices of luxury, materialism, avarice, and a lust for power undermined the social and political fabric of the Republic. And so, the Republic collapsed and dictators then emperors seized power. Corrupt emperors dominated a cowed Senate, and a decadent citizenry ceased to observe and respect the old customs and traditions. Later Roman and post-Roman writers argue that this dissipation of Roman citizens and the corruption of the government enabled the success of the "barbarians" who invaded and conquered Rome in the fifth century. Permutations of this paradigmatic myth appear as explanatory devices for decline in a number of European historical narratives up through and including those Enlightenment writers whose views were so influential in shaping the thought of eighteenth-century European and American leaders and thinkers.[8]

This vision of Rome as a virtuous Republic undermined by imperial corruption haunts the American imagination. The central point of this book is that ever since republican independence in 1776 and right up to the present day, images and narratives of the rise and decline of Rome have played a vital role in how Americans have understood themselves and their history. Americans have legitimated, debated, and contested their political and cultural identities and concerns through selective references to the Roman past.

Senator Byrd's use of Roman history exemplifies this process. When the senator criticizes American presidents for acting like Caesars, and his cohort in the Senate for failing to stop them, he is writing the Roman history he adduces. At the American Historical Association's 2004 award ceremony he declared that he regularly warns his colleagues that "it was when the Roman Senate relinquished control of the purse to Caesar and to the emperors who followed him that Rome ceased to be a republic."[9] Some in the audience surely knew that Byrd's analysis that the major reason for the loss of political independence in Rome was the Senate's loss of economic control was not in agreement with modern historians' views of the reasons for the decline of liberty in ancient Rome. Byrd's view of Roman political power is filtered through the modern lens of the US Constitution's system of checks and balances on the power of the president. Like the framers of the Constitution, Senator Byrd understands political power as a matter of assent

and acquiescence on the part of the people: "Caius Julius Caesar did not seize power in Rome. The Roman Senate thrust power upon Caesar deliberately with forethought, with surrender, with intent to escape from responsibility. The Senate gave away power; the members . . . abandoned their duty as senators, and, in doing so, created in Caesar the most powerful man in the ancient world."[10] As Senator Byrd cites Roman history and Roman authors, he creates his own history of Rome as a way of commenting on contemporary political concerns. He admires Cicero, whom he reveres as the principal defender of the Roman Senate, the institutional bulwark against a military usurper, Julius Caesar. Byrd envisions himself in this Ciceronian role, saving the United States Senate and the country from arrogant and dangerous presidents.[11] But, as we shall see, to be compared to Cicero is not always desirable. Senator Byrd may admire Cicero, but socialist C. Osborne Ward and Marxist Howard Fast, among others, despised Cicero for what they saw as his elitism and self-serving politics.[12] There is a long history of criticizing American political and economic elites through comparing them and their exploitative practices to the behavior of the ancient Roman elites. Rome's history has been appropriated by diverse groups at different historical moments for varied ends – most especially, for debates, explicit and implicit, about politics and culture.

In the following chapters, we will investigate the utility and mutability of images of Rome from the Revolutionary era to the present. This book joins recent work that investigates re-creations and interpretations of ancient Rome and the variety of ways Rome has been used to articulate and address contemporary concerns.[13] These other studies have focused on high culture or deal exclusively with film or, when they deal with other media, lack a consistent focus on one historical culture. My book focuses on the United States and shows how images and narratives of Rome have been adopted and adapted right across American culture, from high-brow to low-brow, and through the course of American history. I take as a point of departure that representations of the Roman past tell us little about the "real" Rome but a lot about the prevailing attitudes and perspectives of the times when the representations were made. We will explore rich and complex dialogues with the Roman past, their richness residing precisely in the ways the Roman past is reformulated for each present moment in time.

To this end, the book focuses on points of particularly intense identification – especially moments of political and economic turbulence. I have selected charged moments in United States history when Rome has been appropriated in order to debate the state of the nation and address internal tensions and anxieties. We will look at portrayals of Rome in different media and forms – writing, architecture, theatre, painting, World's Fairs and Expositions, and film. Following a chronological scheme, I situate different responses to Roman antiquity within changing historical contexts and periods, revealing the ways in which diverse references to Roman history have been utilized by different classes to articulate or contest political and cultural identities.

We begin with the American Revolution. The Revolutionary generation admired the Roman Republican model of government and found exemplary models of behavior in the actions of Roman elites. Cato, Cicero, and Brutus were celebrated for their principled defense of liberty against the "tyranny" of Julius Caesar, the dictator who Americans at the time viewed as the destroyer of the Roman Republic. Then, during the 1820s and 1830s, members of the American middle and working classes extended these analogies to Rome with a new twist. American workers who felt oppressed by the beneficiaries of industrial capitalism compared them to Roman "aristocrats" who exploited the Roman plebeians. To the supporters of President Andrew Jackson's popular democracy, the ruling political elites of Republican Rome offered a negative model of aristocratic and oligarchic domination. In newspapers, magazines, and theatre, Democrats looked into Rome's republican past and identified with champions of the Roman plebeians, such as Caius Marius, or slaves, such as Spartacus. Whig opponents responded by denouncing Andrew Jackson as a dictator and a demagogue – a modern Caesar.

In the antebellum years, as the economic and social divide among classes widened and as the economic and ideological divisions between the North and the South increased, two controversial Roman politicians who worked on behalf of the Roman poor, Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus and his brother, Caius Sempronius Gracchus, emerged as figures for debate, praise, and criticism. In the North, working men praised the Gracchi brothers for their efforts at agrarian reform on behalf of Rome's impoverished citizens and invoked their example in their own struggles for land reform in the United States. But in the South, in a revealing example of the way an episode from the Roman past can be used to argue vastly different positions, planter elites admired the Gracchi for their oratorical skills and their attempts to reform a corrupt Senate, even as they rejected the land reforms the Gracchi and their supporters in the North attempted to enact. Over the course of the 1840s and 1850s debates over the Gracchi's agrarian reforms, Roman slavery, and Roman decline were linked together in support of both pro- and anti-slavery arguments.

In the wake of the Civil War, Northern industrialists acquired monopolies, increasing their profits and those of their shareholders through what appeared to be increasingly ruthless exploitation of workers. Concerned Americans worried that a plutocracy beset by civil strife would destroy the American republic just as had happened, they argued, in Rome. Analogies and allusions to the collapse of the Roman Republic and the emergence of imperial rule help to map these anxieties, as they continued to be widely invoked in America to stake out and articulate ideological positions. Labor reformers, socialists, and other political reformers and activists deployed references to Rome both to describe and to combat the new Caesars: the robber barons and corrupt politicians.

Yet in the same era we also discover in popular historical fiction a new trope for the Roman metaphor: an interest in Romans as the persecutors of virtuous Christians and Jews. Over the course of the nineteenth century, invocations of

Romans as exemplars of commendable moral and civic behavior declined and were replaced – in popular fiction – by Romans as oppressors of pious and courageous Christians and Jews. The new evangelical Protestant culture embraced a triumphal and progressive narrative of early Christian resistance to, and eventual victory over, pagan Rome. This linear narrative was more relevant to the concerns of middle-class Americans than was the eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century cyclical model of the rise and fall of empires along with the Founding Fathers' and Mothers' emulation of heroic Romans of the Republic. To this new, increasingly prosperous, generation of Americans, America was exceptional: America's embrace of evangelical Christianity meant that the country could embrace wealth and empire and yet avoid Rome's cycle of imperial decline.

Over the course of the 1890s and into the twentieth century, Rome's fabled might was translated into power and wealth in the built environment and in material culture as a positive ground of identification. Across America negative references to the decadence and imperial overreach of ancient Rome, previously common in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, were overshadowed by a celebratory linking of the ancient Roman and modern American empires. Analogies drawn between the ancient Roman and modern American empires now helped to articulate and legitimate America's recent acquisition of an overseas empire, whilst fabricated connections with the imperial Roman world came to undergird new cultural and class hierarchies. In mass culture, entertainment entrepreneurs played the role of populist emperors and offered the public voyeuristic access to a sumptuous and titillating realm of imperial pleasures. Imperial pleasures were no longer frowned upon but instead were increasingly to be consumed, enjoyed, and displayed by all classes.

Within a few years though, the Great Depression was calling into question such celebrations of progress and empire. The Hollywood entertainment industry responded by utilizing Roman imagery to frame the middle-class reaction to hardship and political turbulence during the crisis. Cecil B. DeMille's sword-and-sandal epics wed the popular appeal of spectacles of Roman decadence to plots glorifying conservative religious values. Reacting to the mixed messages sent by such films, Jewish studio owner Samuel Goldwyn commissioned a comic parody, *Roman Scandals*, starring Jewish film star Eddie Cantor. Absent from Goldwyn's film is any hint of the popular trope of Romans as persecutors of Christians; corrupt officials and monopoly capitalism are the evils in this Rome, and ordinary citizens are the oppressed. *Roman Scandals* entertained the Depression-era audience by exposing political corruption within the body politic, both Roman and American.

Later, during the Cold War, Roman metaphors were deployed again in mainstream Hollywood films, but now both as allegories of the global geo-politics of the times and as analogues of domestic politics and tensions. Two interrelated texts used the slave revolt of Spartacus as a way of commenting on American politics and culture: Marxist Howard Fast's 1951 historical novel, *Spartacus*, and its

1960 cinematic adaptation of the same name by Hollywood actor and producer Kirk Douglas. In Fast's subversive novel, published at the height of the witch hunts of communists in the McCarthy era, Rome stands for capitalist, class-divided America, and the slaves stand for modern wage slaves, the exploited proletariat. Fast's novel was a clarion call for revolution. Kirk Douglas's Hollywood film drew on Fast's novel and offered a critique of domestic politics, while downplaying the revolutionary impetus of Fast's tale.

The final chapter brings us into the late twentieth century, exploring the shifting uses of Rome in Las Vegas. In sharp contrast to the negative view of imperial Rome in both Fast's and Douglas's Spartacus, the casino-resort Caesars Palace (inaugurated 1966) deliberately exploited the cultural force of the myth of a decadent and fabulously wealthy imperial Rome to encourage patrons to indulge, consume, and spend. Since the 1960s, the merging of the entertainment, hotel, and retail industries has resulted in the incorporation of more mainstream forms of consumption and leisure in this Las Vegas resort. At the Forum Shops, a shopping mall built in 1992 next to Caesars Palace and named after the Roman Forum, images of an opulent and elegant imperial Rome promote ever-increasing consumerism and consumption in a Roman-themed civic space. By the end of the twentieth century Rome was no longer a tool for articulating working-class concerns: consumer culture had co-opted Rome for mass consumption.

What emerges powerfully throughout this book is the malleability and remarkable continuity of Rome in the American imagination. Since the founding of the nation, Americans have used images and connotations of ancient Rome to define themselves and take the measure of their own cultural, political, and material achievements. Different classes have appropriated the Roman past to legitimate, debate, or contest the pressing issues and concerns of the times they lived in. Rome's history therefore has shifted and changed its meaning depending on who is invoking it and for what purpose. When we analyze differing interpretations and uses of Roman history within a given historical context we uncover the competing attitudes and world views that resonated at those times. History moves on, "rewritten by the victors," but long-forgotten visions and alternative world views remain, buried but unaltered in the sedimented layers of history, in newspaper articles and political speeches, plays and novels, architecture, painting, and film, waiting for us to recognize them. History may be rewritten but these artifacts remain, eloquent witnesses of the thoughts and mind-sets of our forebears.

This book has been a journey of discovery. I set out to write a book that showed how Roman antiquity remains relevant for today, how its malleability keeps it alive in surprising and often overlooked forms. In part that is what I have done, but along the way I have surprised myself because what has emerged is an excavation of modern American history. This book is about cultural reception and the relevance of Rome in the United States, but it is also a book about the often forgotten, marginalized, or silenced history of modern America.

Notes

1 Cicero, *Orator* 120. "Nescire autem quid ante quam natus sis acciderit, id est semper esse puerum. Quid enim est aetas hominis, nisi ea memoria rerum veterum cum superiorum aetate contexitur?"
2 Byrd (2004a).
3 D. J. Saunders, "Tax dollars at work," *New York Times* (December 31, 1993).
4 N. A. Lewis, "Byrd's eloquent voice continues to fight to honor tradition in the Senate," *New York Times* (November 29, 1997).
5 Obama (2006), 74–5.
6 The unnamed senator was annoyed at Senator Byrd's delaying tactics for the establishment of a homeland security department. J. Tierney, "Threats and responses: The Senate; Byrd, at 85, fills the Forum with Romans and wrath," *New York Times* (November 19, 2002).
7 S. Fritz, "Senator Byrd learns from, shapes history," *St. Petersburg Times* (September 23, 2002).
8 Pocock (1975). Bondanella (1987) tracks and analyzes the myth of Rome from antiquity to the present.
9 Byrd (2004a). "In speech after speech opposing the line-item veto, I warned that it was when the Roman Senate relinquished control of the purse to Caesar and to the emperors who followed him that Rome ceased to be a republic. As long as I am in the United States Senate, I am determined this mistake will never happen here."
10 Byrd (1995), 161–3; also quoted in Maddox (2006), 148.
11 As the title of his most recent book makes clear (2004b): *Losing America: Confronting a Reckless and Arrogant Presidency.*
12 Like Cicero, Senator Byrd has his critics. He has been called the "King of Pork" for his success in funneling federal funds to his West Virginia constituency. He joined the Ku Klux Klan when he was young, opposed civil rights legislation in his earlier years in the Senate, and vilified those who protested against the Vietnam War. Senator Barack Obama was aware of historical irony as he listened to Senator Byrd conjuring up "the spirits of Senates past" to warn of the "dangerous encroachment, year after year, of the Executive Branch on the Senate's precious independence." Senator Byrd's presence brought Obama "back to a time when neither I nor those who looked like me could have sat within these walls. I felt with full force all the essential contradictions of me in this new place, with its marble busts, its arcane traditions, its memories and its ghosts. I pondered the fact that, according to his own autobiography, Senator Byrd had received his first taste of leadership in his early twenties, as a member of the Raleigh County Ku Klux Klan, an association that he had long disavowed, an error he attributed – no doubt correctly – to the time and place in which he'd been raised, but which continued to surface as an issue throughout his career. I thought about how he had joined other giants of the Senate, like J. William Fulbright of Arkansas and Richard Russell of Georgia, in Southern resistance to civil rights legislation." Obama (2006), 74–5.
13 Bondanella (1987); Vance (1989); Galinsky (1992); Liversidge and Edwards (1996); Wyke (1997); Edwards (1999); Wyke and Biddiss (1999); Joshel, Malamud, and McGuire (2001); Winkler (2001a); Cyrino (2005); and Wyke (2006a).

1

Exemplary Romans in the Early Republic

In September 1777, the British army captured Philadelphia, defeating George Washington's Continental Army. Through the long and difficult winter that followed, the demoralized troops camped out at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. The situation was dire and the physical discomforts the men endured during the winter were exhausting, as this excerpt from the diary of Albigence Waldo, a surgeon stationed at Valley Forge, makes vividly clear:

> December 14: I am Sick – discontented – and out of humour. Poor food – hard lodging – Cold Weather – fatigue – Nasty Cloaths – nasty Cookery – Vomit half my time – smoak'd out my senses – the Devil's in't – I can't Endure it – Why are we sent here to starve and Freeze – What sweet Felicities have I left at home; A charming Wife – pretty Children – Good Beds – good food – good Cookery – all aggreable – all harmonious. Here all Confusion – smoke and Cold – hunger and filthyness – A pox on my bad luck. There comes a bowl of beef soup – full of burnt leaves and dirt, sickish enough to make a Hector spue.[1]

By early May of 1778, the weather finally improved. After long months of training under the Prussian Baron von Steuben and as new recruits and supplies arrived the ragged insurgent force was transformed into a disciplined fighting unit. Seeking to rally his troops for the new season of campaigns, General George Washington requested a performance of Joseph Addison's 1713 play, *Cato*, confident in the tonic effect that Cato's clarion call to fight to the death for liberty would have on the army as it prepared to regroup and engage the British:

> So shall we gain still one day's liberty;
> And let me perish, but in Cato's judgment,
> A day, an hour, of virtuous liberty,
> Is worth a whole eternity in bondage.[2]

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Washington was not relying on novelty to invigorate his troops, nor was he an isolated commander out of touch with the tastes of his men. He was well aware that his fellow Americans defined themselves in relation not only to the British of the day, but also to the Romans of the past.

Cato was first performed in the American colonies in 1735 in Charleston, South Carolina, some twenty years after its opening performance in London.[3] Within a few decades, *Cato* had become the most popular play in pre-Revolutionary America.[4] Its theme of liberty opposing tyranny clearly struck a chord in the nascent republic. Addison had based his play on Plutarch's lives of Cato the Younger and Julius Caesar, texts well known in the American colonies.[5] According to Plutarch, Cato committed suicide in 46 BCE, unwilling to live in a world led by Caesar and refusing to grant Caesar the power to pardon him.[6] Addison's play focuses on the last days of Cato's life and his suicide in Utica. Part of the popular appeal of the plot lies in the intertwining of the fall of the Roman Republic with the two imaginary love stories of Cato's daughter, Marcia, with the Numidian prince Juba, and of Cato's son, Portius, with Lucia, daughter of the Roman senator Lucius. But the parallels between the desperate situation of Cato's men in the North African desert and the American army's trials during the winter of 1777 must have had special meaning for Washington and his men, who were living, not acting, the Republicans' fierce embrace of liberty (voiced below by the fervent Sempronius, unsuccessful suitor of Marcia):

> When liberty is gone,
> Life grows insipid, and has lost its relish.
> O could my dying hand but lodge a sword
> In Caesar's bosom, and revenge my country,
> By heavens I could enjoy the pangs of death,
> And smile in agony.[7]

Analogy with the virtuous Cato lifted the Revolutionary soldiers' struggle to a grand or mythic level, and out of the misery described by our surgeon.[8]

The exemplary qualities of the Roman tragedy were clear to Washington. Its hero, Cato, the charismatic Stoic who, almost from his death, was the very model of a patriotic hero, embodied the qualities most admired in eighteenth-century America: civic virtue, unselfish patriotism, and courage. Its antagonist, Julius Caesar, stood for their opposites: unchecked ambition and tyrannical oppression. "Dost thou love watchings, abstinence, and toil, / Laborious virtues all? Learn them from Cato; / Success and fortune must thou learn from Caesar."[9] Caesar was emblematic of tyranny, and resistance against tyranny even when hope of victory was gone, the central theme of Addison's play, resonated with Washington's army. His soldiers packed the playhouse to the doors.

At the time of the American Revolution, Caesar was popularly represented as a tyrant whose ruthless ambition brought down the Roman Republic. Colonists

invoked Caesar's political opponents Brutus, Cassius, Cato, and Cicero as heroes in their own struggle against the British monarchy. The colonists made these Roman liberators' struggle against Caesar analogous to their own struggle against the British crown, disparagingly referring to English government officials as "Caesars." In 1771, for example, John Adams drew this comparison of Massachusetts' new royal governor, Thomas Hutchinson: "Caesar, by destroying the Roman Republic, made himself a perpetual Dictator; Hutchinson, by countenancing and supporting a System of Corruption and Tyranny, has made himself Governor."[10] But, while Cato and his men were doomed to ultimate defeat, in the American context there was still the possibility of victory.[11] The new liberators could correct the course of history, overthrow the "tyranny" of the British, and establish an American republic that would be stronger and better than the Roman Republic.

The Founders embraced Enlightenment views of the inevitable historical cycle of the rise and fall of empires. John Adams believed that if America established a republic, America, like Rome, could rise to glory, grandeur, and empire: "Immortal Rome was at first but an insignificant Village, inhabited only by a few abandoned Ruffians, but by beginnings it rose to a stupendous Height, and excell'd in Arts and Arms all nations that preceded it," Adams wrote in 1755.[12] The unvarying cycle of imperial rise and decline suggested that America was on the rise; Adams pointed out that

> If we look into History we shall find some nations rising from contemptible beginnings, and spreading their influence, 'till the whole Globe is subjected to their sway. When they reach'd the summit of Grandeur, some minute and unsuspected Cause commonly effects their Ruin, and the Empire of the world is transferred to some other place.[13]

In European thought this had evolved into a commonplace presumption that the seat of empires had emerged first in the ancient Near East, before moving to Greece, Rome, and then Great Britain. Now, some Founding Fathers believed, it was America's turn to rule an empire. According to this view, the British Empire was in decline, undermined by wealth and decadence, but in America, as Adams put it, "it is the time of Ennius with us."[14] Furthermore, Enlightenment views that humanity had embarked on an unprecedented march of progress freed from the superstitions and traditions of past ages suggested that a new American republic could match and even surpass the glories of Rome while avoiding, or at least delaying for an indefinite period of time, any subsequent decline and fall. This, however, would require the cultivation of virtue on the part of citizens. Civic virtue would be the "moral cement" of republican society, reflecting the widely held belief that Greek and Roman polities had fallen when their citizens lost their sense of virtue.[15]

Livy, the great chronicler of the Roman Republic, advised his readers that in his history "you can find for yourself and your country both examples and warnings;

fine things to take as models, base things, rotten through and through, to avoid."[16] John Adams gave his 14-year-old son, John Quincy Adams, the same advice in a letter he wrote on May 18, 1781: "In company with Sallust, Cicero, Tacitus and Livy, you will learn Wisdom and Virtue. You will see them represented, with all the Charms which Language and Imagination can exhibit, and Vice and Folly painted in all their Deformity and Horror."[17] The perceived affinity between Republican Rome and Revolutionary America led the Founders to look for instructive exemplars of virtue and corruption in Roman authors.[18] Roman accounts of the expulsion of the Etruscan monarchy and the foundation of the Roman Republic, and then Rome's subsequent slide from republican virtues to a corrupting materialism and imperialism, offered a series of exemplars to emulate or avoid. Eighteenth-century Americans, like their European counterparts, avidly scanned the classics for suitable – and unsuitable – models of behavior. Ancient exemplars helped men and women know how to live well and, even more important in these troubled times, how to die well. Nathan Hale recalled Addison even on his way to the gallows for espionage; his "I regret that I have but one life to give to my country" is a paraphrase of Addison's Cato saying, on receiving the dead body of his son, "Who would not be that youth? What pity is it / That we can die but once to serve our country."[19] An epilogue written by Jonathan Sewall for a 1778 performance of Addison's *Cato* at the Bow Street Theater in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, makes clear what was at stake in contemporary performances of the play:

> In Caesar's days had such a daring mind
> With Washington's serenity been joined
> The tyrant then had bled, great Cato liv'd,
> Rise then, my countrymen! For fight prepare,
> Gird on your swords, and fearless rush to war!
> For your grieved country nobly dare to die,
> And empty all your veins for Liberty.
> No pent-up Utica contracts your pow'rs,
> But the whole boundless continent is yours![20]

Sewall's epilogue links the fight for liberty with conquest and expansion. Imitation of the Roman Republican heroes would result in a virtuous and healthy polity stretching across "the whole boundless continent," whereas following the example of Julius Caesar would corrupt the moral and political state of the young nation. "What is a Roman that is Caesar's foe?" asks Decius in Addison's play. "Greater than Caesar, he's the friend of virtue," Cato replies.[21]

The contrast between Cato and Caesar was paradigmatic and drummed into children from a young age; their textbooks regularly included passages from Addison's *Cato* and Sewall's epilogue.[22] The *Columbian Orator*, a widely used school reader, also includes in its lessons the lines spoken at a school exhibition by a seven-year-old boy, whose poem ends:

> These thoughts inspire my youthful mind
> To be the greatest of mankind;
> Great, not like Cesar [sic], stain'd with blood;
> But only great, as I am good."[23]

Another textbook recommended adopting Cato as a sort of internal personal surveillance monitor: "That when we are by ourselves, and in our greatest solitude, we should fancy that Cato stands before us, and sees every thing we do."[24] Similarly, Alexander Pope's prologue to Addison's play sums up the aim of the performance:

> To wake the soul by tender strikes of art,
> To raise the genius and to mend the heart,
> To make mankind in conscious virtue bold,
> Live o'er each scene, and be what they behold.[25]

Eighteenth-century Americans believed in the educative mission of the arts, as Diderot declared: "To make virtue attractive, vice odious, ridicule forceful: that is the aim of every honest man who takes up the pen, the brush or the chisel."[26]

The pen, the brush, the chisel . . . neoclassical aesthetic theory suggested that writers, painters, and sculptors could capture moral virtues on paper, canvas, or stone, shaping and molding not only the raw material of art, but through art, human souls. Plays, classical texts, paintings, and even statues and busts of eminent individuals in marble or bronze served to inspire men and women to virtuous action.[27] According to the theory of contagion, virtue or vice could be induced simply by being in the presence of an exemplary figure or in contact with one through literary description or artistic representation.[28] This helps us understand why Thomas Jefferson's tea-room in Monticello contained busts and 28 portraits of exceptional men, while John Quincy Adams had six bronze busts of ancient exemplars, which he called his "Household Gods."[29] Indeed, Addison's play shows the process of "contagion" at work: for his Juba, the mere presence of Cato inspired virtuous behavior. Cato's son Portius calls attention in act 1 to his passionate emulation of Cato:

> Behold young Juba, the Numidian prince!
> With how much care he forms himself to glory,
> And breaks the fierceness of his native temper
> To copy out our father's bright example.[30]

Juba expresses his admiration to Cato in similar terms: "I'm charm'd whene'er thou talk'st. I pant for virtue! / And all my soul endeavors at perfection."[31] Early American art and education aimed at nothing less than this: the (re)production of classical heroes – and heroines.

Elite educated white women were encouraged to study Greek and Roman history, usually in English or French translations.[32] One widely used school text published in 1792 recommended the study of history:

> What more agreeable entertainment to the mind than to mark the rise, progress, declension, and final extinction of the most flourishing empires; the virtues which contributed to their greatness, and the vices which drew on their ruin? It is an unpardonable ignorance in persons, of whatever sex or condition, not to be acquainted with the history of their own country, together with the histories of ancient Greece and Rome.[33]

Elite women believed in the same theory of imitation as their male counterparts, and Noah Webster's 1789 *An American Selection of Lessons in Reading and Speaking* (issued 40 times before 1801) offered various exemplars for American women to emulate. Roman matrons were admired for their dignity, courageousness, and piety. The Sabine women were exemplary for their loyalty to their abductors for the sake of peace. Portia, the wife of the Roman senator Brutus, was admired for her staunch support for her husband and for his conspiracy against Caesar. According to Plutarch, Portia's support was so unwavering that she committed suicide by swallowing hot coals after hearing of Brutus' death.[34] Abigail Adams, wife of John Adams, so admired Portia that she signed her letters to her own husband "Portia."[35] Cornelia, the patriotic mother of the Roman politicians Tiberius and Caius Gracchus, was another favorite, as was Arria, wife of the politician Caecima Paetus, who had been condemned to take his own life during Nero's reign. Arria showed him how to die nobly: she plunged a dagger into her own breast saying, "Paetus, it does not hurt." Marcia the Younger, daughter of Cato, who features in Addison's *Cato*, was exemplary for unmarried women. In Addison's play, Marcia models herself after her father.

> Cato's soul
> Shines out in everything she acts or speaks,
> While winning mildness and attractive smiles
> Dwell in her looks, and with becoming grace
> Soften the rigour of her father's virtues.[36]

Like a good republican daughter, Marcia defers to her father and country and refrains from a romantic involvement with the Numidian prince Juba so that he can fight Caesar.[37]

American women commented on the health of the nation through writing history and creating fictional worlds peopled with ancient Romans.[38] Mercy Otis Warren, a historian, poet, and playwright, frequently signed herself "Marcia" in her long correspondence with both John and Abigail Adams. Warren is here referring not to the unmarried Marcia the Younger but to her mother Marcia, wife of Cato: a woman of reputed excellence, according to Plutarch.[39] In one of her

poems, Warren urges American women to emulate the austere patriotism of Roman matrons:

> Let us resolve on a small sacrifice,
> And in the pride of Roman matrons rise;
> Good as Cornelia, or as Pompey's wife,
> We'll quit the useless vanities of life.
> America has many a worthy name,
> Who shall, hereafter, grace the rolls of fame.
> Her good Cornelias, and her Arrias fair,
> Who, death, in its most hideous forms, can dare.[40]

Some years later, alarmed, perhaps, at the emerging factionalism, materialism, and open pursuit of commercial wealth that characterized the 1780s, Warren's didactic play *The Sack of Rome* (1790) makes Rome vulnerable to barbarian conquest because luxury has made citizens dissolute.[41] Warren clearly intended the play to show how luxury and self-centeredness can undermine polities. She dedicated the play to President George Washington, who, living up to the selfless standards of his Roman Republican heroes, had resigned his commission as commander in chief of the Continental Army after the peace treaty between Great Britain and the United States was signed in 1783, and returned to private life.

Washington's self-abnegating gesture was astonishing, but even more astonishingly, he repeated it 13 years later. To the surprise of European contemporaries, Washington did not hold on to power when he was president. He stepped down from the presidency in 1796 after serving two terms. His contemporaries saw him as modeling the Roman values admired in the early Republic so well that they often portrayed him with Roman symbols. Antonio Canova sculpted Washington in Roman military dress, his sword laid down to symbolize his relinquishment of power, his pen poised to write his farewell address on his departure from the presidency (figure 1.1). Jean-Antoine Houdon sculpted him as a modern American gentleman with his hands resting on the fasces, a symbol of Roman authority. John Trumbull and Charles Willson Peale painted him as Cincinnatus, the Roman farmer famously called from the plough to be dictator and lead the defense of Rome when the neighboring Aequi had surrounded the Roman army.[42] After saving the Republic, Cincinnatus relinquished power and went back to his farm. On his death, Washington was eulogized both as a Cato and a Cincinnatus.

In America, Washington's avoidance of Caesarism made his life an example for his immediate presidential successors and for generations of American citizens.[43] It also provided a basis for believing that America would remain exceptional as long as its citizens cultivated virtue and acted with the best interests of the republic in mind. On the other side of the Atlantic, Napoleon, the general turned imperial monarch, was making very different uses of Roman models, and appealing to a very different set of Roman virtues. In contrast to Washington's abhorrence, Napoleon

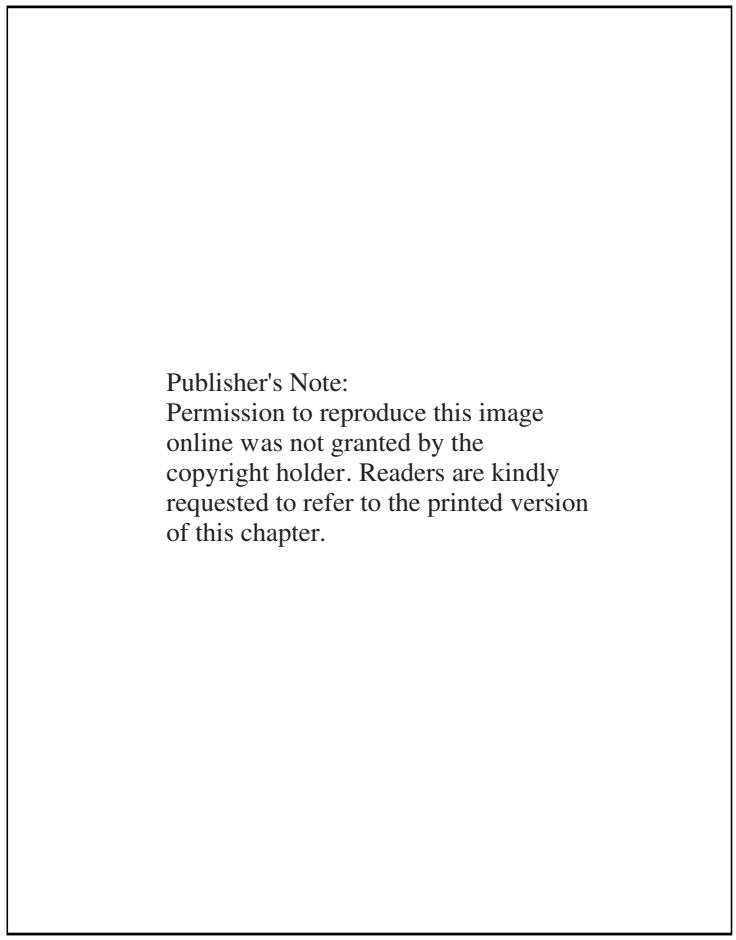
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Figure 1.1 Antonio Canova, *General George Washington*, 1820–1. Courtesy of the North Carolina Office of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

clearly admired Julius Caesar, and admired his imperial successor, Caesar Augustus, even more. French artists active at the court in Paris utilized references to both Roman rulers in art and iconography to illustrate and celebrate Napoleon's move from victorious general and first consul of the French Republic to Napoleon I, emperor of France.[44] By 1802 it had become clear that Napoleon intended to eliminate the newly created French Republic: he named himself first consul for life and in 1804, with the pope presiding, he crowned himself emperor (figure 1.2). As emperor, his face and name adorned coins, engravings, paintings and public monuments, a campaign of propaganda modeled on that of Augustus, the Roman emperor who claimed to have brought peace to the strife-torn republic and to have launched a golden age of prosperity and culture.

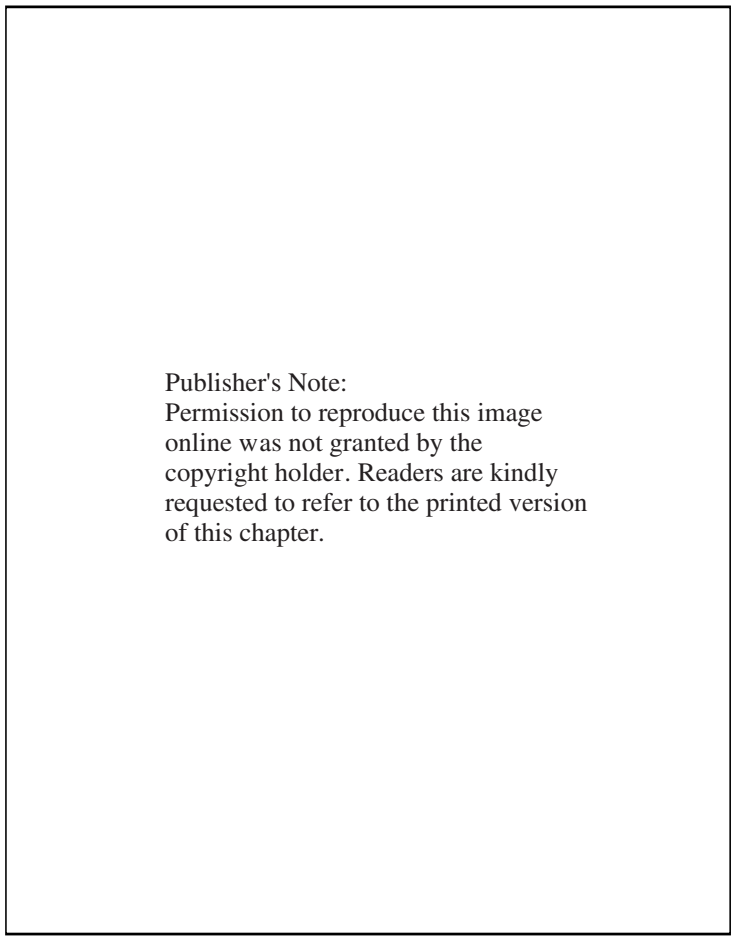
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Figure 1.2 Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, *Napoleon on His Imperial Throne*, 1806. Oil on canvas. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rennes, France. Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.

For American observers, the failure of the French Republican experiment and its descent into absolutism in the person of Napoleon was disturbing but not surprising. The trajectory of the French Revolution and its aftermath was consistent with the classic cycle of imperial rise and fall in which republican democracy leads to mob rule, then autocracy and tyranny. It was the different outcome of the American Revolution that was the real surprise.[45]

In Roman and European political history Julius Caesar has been an ambivalent figure who has signified both tyrant and champion of the people.[46] But in the United States Caesar was so firmly painted as a negative tyrant in Revolutionary political discourse that the more positive aspects of Caesar and his political accomplishments have rarely been invoked. Caesar has almost always signified a

dictator or tyrant. Absent as well from American political discourse is a positive model for the political accomplishments of the first Roman emperor, Augustus.

The republic of George Washington's day lasted only a generation; like France after its revolution, America had evolved into an empire, though its governmental model remained republican. Vast new territories were added to the Union, including Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase in 1803 and Florida in 1819, transforming the United States into a continental commercial power. Americans built new cities and ports, and new roads and canals enabled increased trade and commerce. Factories and mass production changed the work experiences of many Americans and the consumption experiences of many more. Would the new wealth from industrialization and territorial expansion bring in its wake political and moral corruption? Worrying that *luxus* (luxury) and the deleterious effects of the rapid accumulation of wealth on morals were insinuating themselves into the new republic, John Adams asked Thomas Jefferson in 1819: "Will you tell me how to prevent riches from producing luxury? Will you tell me how to prevent luxury from producing effeminacy, intoxication, extravagance, vice, and folly?"[47] Factionalism and the pursuit of power and wealth by ambitious and self-interested men soon led some to worry that the new republic was in danger of replicating Rome's trajectory of decline even as others celebrated its rise as a commercial power.

An American Caesar?

Some Founding Fathers hoped that an enlightened aristocracy, inspired by civic virtue, would govern the republic with the good of the collective in mind. But the sweeping changes from the 1790s on undermined the social, political, and economic fabric of the republic of Washington's time. Many Americans sought a greater share of the new economic wealth and the expansion of commerce and so they increasingly demanded a more direct form of democracy. Resentment of the aristocratic establishment and the new mercantile monopolies grew increasingly more outspoken and strident as factions and divisions within the republic called for political egalitarianism. Suffrage was expanded to include all white men with the abolition of property ownership and tax payments as qualifications for voting. This was quickly followed by the election to the presidency of the Tennessee general-turned-politician, Andrew Jackson, signaling a decisive shift in American politics from the aristocratic government of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to the popular democracy of Jackson and his supporters. As democracy swept the country, fifth-century Athens was elevated as the exemplary ancient polity. To supporters of Andrew Jackson, Republican Rome now offered a *negative* model of aristocratic domination. Jackson's opponents, on the other hand, feared the rise of an American Caesar, civil strife, and the collapse of the new republic.

In 1829, Andrew Jackson became the seventh president, defeating the incumbent, John Quincy Adams. Adams was the last in the line of classically educated

gentlemen statesmen to be president. He was a member of a distinguished family: his father had been the vice-president (1789–97) and then president (1797–1801) of the new republic. Now the son, John Quincy Adams, feared that he was witnessing a repetition of the last days of the Roman Republic. Upon his retirement from the presidency, he read the complete works of Cicero and worried about the state of the American republic: "I watch with his sleepless nights. I hear his solitary sighs. I feel the agitation of his pulse, not for himself, but for his son, his Tullia, for his country."[48] To Adams, viewing the great changes of the times through the lens of Roman history, it seemed that the accumulation of excessive wealth had indeed opened the door to the dangers of *luxus*. Classical Republican political philosophy and ideology suggested that the corruption of the political process and, ultimately, the rise of tyrants and demagogues would surely follow.[49]

Andrew Jackson, the son of Ulster immigrants, had grown up in the backwoods of South Carolina and was virtually unschooled. Neither an aristocrat nor educated in the classics, he first acquired fame and popular adulation for his skills as a general. He was the "Hero of New Orleans," the man who defeated the British in one of the most famous battles of the War of 1812, and the general who, in 1818, crushed the Seminole Indians, seized Spanish forts in Florida, and authorized the court-martial and execution of two British men who had aided the Indians. Such autocratic behavior won Jackson popularity in some circles but led Senator Henry Clay, then Speaker of the House of Representatives, to recommend the censure of Jackson, warning: "Remember that Greece had her Alexander, Rome had her Caesar, England her Cromwell, France her Bonaparte, and that, if we are to escape the rock on which they split, we must avoid their errors."[50] Clay, who remained an outspoken critic of Jackson throughout his political career, saw Jackson's conduct in Florida as analogous to that of Caesar in Gaul: "In the provinces," he wrote, "were laid the abuses and the seeds of the ambitious projects which overturned the liberties of Rome."[51]

Just as Julius Caesar had done in his times, Jackson aroused passions that crystallized the concerns and anxieties of his age. He became, as Harry Watson has put it, the "symbolic leader of American political transformation."[52] The social, economic, and political differences and transformations that were dividing the new nation were expressed and condensed in the ardent debates about the merits and dangers of Jackson's presidency (1829–37). To his opponents he was a Caesar, an arrogant and imperious military hero-turned-demagogue who would lead the republic into tyranny and a damaging imperialism. Senator Clay had compared Jackson to Caesar years before he ran for president. Once in office, Jackson did nothing to assuage Clay's anxieties about his potential for Caesarism. "Caesar," critics of Jackson warned, "had 'harangued' the Senate, degraded its 'dignity and authority,' and appealed to the people against his senatorial adversaries; so had Jackson."[53] Jackson governed like an autocrat and used the presidential veto to override the wishes of Congress. Noah Webster fulminated against those "*democrats*, as they call themselves" who were so "servile" that they would even

allow Jackson to "assume the imperial purple" if he wished.[54] Not so, said the majority. On December 21, 1832, E. C. Genet of Prospect Hill, Greenbush, New York, presented Andrew Jackson with an ancient medal struck in honor of Julius Caesar. On the medal was inscribed the laconic report made by Caesar of one of his victories: *Veni, vidi, vici* ("I came, I saw, I conquered"). Genet, in bestowing the medal on the president, said:

> The Romans, in commemorating that glorious event, did not anticipate that it would ever be surpassed; but, sir, you have effectually surpassed Caesar. The Roman hero corrupted his fellow citizens with the plundered treasures of Asia, became the oppressor of the world, and attempted to raise a throne on the ruins of the republic; whilst the patriotic hero of New Orleans . . . hath strengthened the independence and liberty of his country . . . It may therefore justly be said; *Quod Caesar fecit, Jackson superavit* ["What Caesar did, Jackson has done better"].[55]

To some, at least, it appeared that Jackson displayed the virtues but not the vices of the Roman general (figure 1.3).

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Figure 1.3 Bust of Jackson as a Roman. Hiram Powers, *Andrew Jackson, 7th US President*, 1835. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC/Art Resource, NY.

In any event, the Roman political model was by now beginning to lose its luster for many American citizens. Thoughtful observers, even those who had put their faith in Roman exempla for over half a century, began to express doubts about the worthiness or applicability of the Roman paradigm. In 1819, Thomas Jefferson confessed to John Adams in a letter that his first reaction on reading the letters of Cicero was to feel himself in the presence of "the purest effusions of an exalted patriot," but on reflection to wonder "what was that government which the virtues of Cicero were so zealous to restore, and the ambition of Caesar to subvert: certainly not good government since they never had it from the rape of the Sabines to the ravages of the Caesars."[56] Andrew Jackson called his own political beliefs an extension of "good old Jeffersonian Democratic principles," and his supporters looked into Rome's Republican past and identified with those who had resisted Roman aristocratic oppression.[57] Jacksonian democrats' ideological view of Roman history as a struggle between the plebeians and the patricians was deployed to reinforce their own views and rally their political allies.[58]

Jackson's opponents joined forces in 1834 under the banner of the Whig party, the name the Revolutionary patriots had adopted in opposing the British monarchy. Whigs worried about the dangers of factionalism and tyranny. Philip Hone, a wealthy merchant and former mayor of New York, feared that if the Whigs did not prevail in the upcoming election:

> This noble country of ours will be subjected to all the horrors of civil war; our republican institutions, theoretically so beautiful but relying too much upon the virtue and intelligence of the people, will be broken into pieces, and a suffering and abused people will be compelled to submit to the degrading alternative of Jacobin misrule or the tyranny of a Caesar, a Cromwell, or a Bonaparte.[59]

Hone and other Whigs did not trust in "the virtue and intelligence of the people" to preserve the fragile new republic. They worried that Jackson, like Caesar and other politicians and generals, might manipulate the populace and undermine republican institutions. Appropriating the rhetoric of the last days of the Roman Republic, the Whigs portrayed themselves as the counterparts of the Roman senators who defended their Republic and fought against Julius Caesar. Cato may have lost to Caesar and to the *imperium* (sovereignty) of Augustus after him, but the American Whigs hoped to win their struggle against Jackson and popular democracy.

In the 1770s, the dangers to liberty had been cast as coming from the distant imperialism of the British monarchy, like an absent Caesar crossing the Rubicon to threaten the liberty of those living along the eastern seaboard of America. Now, in the 1830s, Whigs believed the threat was from ambitious and ruthless citizens within the American republic. Now the threat was from a Caesar within the American government. "I cannot but recollect," wrote one critic of Jackson,

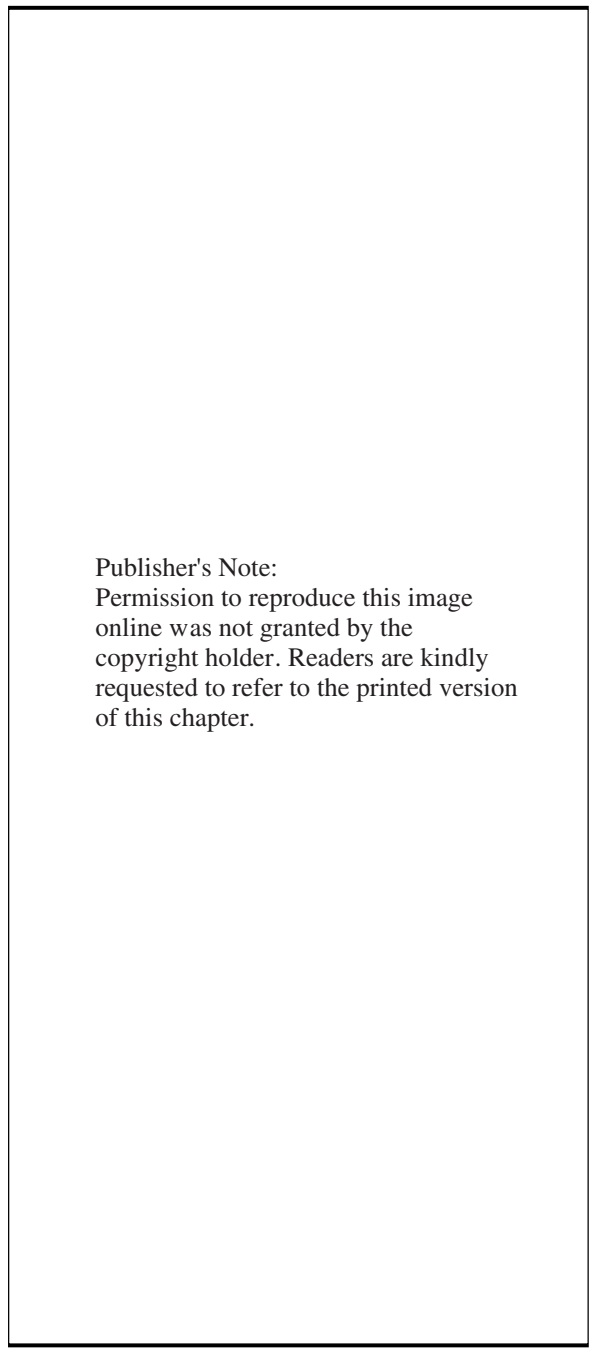
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Figure 1.4 *King Andrew the First*, c.1832. Courtesy of the Tennessee Historical Society.

> that Caesar was the greatest democrat Rome ever produced . . . and that his first steps were to cypherize the Senate and judicial tribunals; to take into his own hands the whole power of appointment to office, and to distribute the spoils of victory among his adherents. It was these measures . . . that enabled him to lay deep the foundations of the imperial throne . . . it is time to look about us, and anxiously consider, whether the days of the constitution and of the Republic be not already numbered.[60]

According to this critic, Jackson, like Caesar, was an ambitious leader who wished to govern like a king. In 1831 *Niles' Register* suggested that the "future battle cry of the anti-Jacksonians might well be the motto adopted by a Vermont newspaper: 'Not the glory of Caesar, but the welfare of Rome'."[61] "Brutus has taken the field against Caesar," commented the *Baltimore Patriot* after the publication of a letter in the *United States Gazette* written by a former supporter of the president explaining why "the original friends of General Jackson cannot [now] support his reelection."[62] Critics accused Jackson of endangering liberty and he was shown in cartoons trampling the constitution and wearing regalia (figure 1.4).[63]

Whig congressional rhetoric repeatedly portrayed Jackson as Caesar incarnate.[64] When Jackson attempted to break the Second Bank of the United States (and the power of monopoly) by seizing the deposits of the nation's bank and putting them in state banks, he prompted outrage in Congress. In a dramatic speech given during the last days of 1833, Senator Henry Clay accused Jackson of endangering public liberty and establishing a tyranny. He compared Jackson's dismissal of secretary of the treasury William J. Duane to Caesar's seizure of the Roman treasury during his war with Pompey. Holding Plutarch in one hand and reciting his account of Caesar's actions, Clay explained to his congressional cohort the analogy to Jackson's behavior and the dangers it presented to the nation.[65]

Senator John C. Calhoun, who had been Jackson's first vice-president, agreed that Jackson had acted like Julius Caesar when he had invaded the public treasury on his way to destroying the Roman Republic, and he warned:

> We are at the same stage of our political revolution . . . With men and money Caesar struck down Roman liberty, at the fatal battle of Pharsalia, never to rise again; from which disastrous hour all the powers of the Roman Republic were consolidated in the person of Caesar, and perpetuated in his line. With money and corrupt partisans a great effort is now making to choke and stifle the voice of American liberty.[66]

In Calhoun's opinion, Jackson's autocratic actions resembled Caesar's and if unchecked might lead to the loss of American political liberty. Another critic compared Jackson to the first Roman emperor, Augustus, and urged his fellow citizens to guard their liberties, which were being "insidiously assailed" by the president. He warned that "a government may be a republic in form, but a despotism in fact. Augustus Caesar did not change the forms of the Roman Republic, but exercised a most despotic power over the laws, the liberty and the prosperity of the citizens."[67] Here, Jackson is compared negatively to the cunning Emperor

Augustus, who maintained the façade of the Roman Republic whilst in fact acquiring virtually monarchical powers.

Jackson defended himself against these and other senatorial condemnations.[68] He protested that he was not moved by ambition like other conquerors and usurpers:

> No; the ambition which leads me on, is. . . . to persuade my countrymen, so far as I may, that it is not in a splendid government, supported by powerful monopolies and aristocratical establishments, that they will find happiness, or their liberties protected, but in a plain system, void of pomp – protecting all, and granting favors to none.[69]

In a letter to Andrew Jackson, Jr., in 1834, Jackson asserted that "It was a corrupt and venal senate that overturned the liberty of Rome before ever Cezar [sic] reached her gates."[70] From the point of view of Jackson and his supporters, Jackson represented the interests of the exploited citizenry, and they laid the blame for the problems of the nation squarely on the corruption and exploitative practices of America's ruling classes. According to Jackson, the greatest danger to liberty arose from moral turpitude: "It is from within, among yourselves – from cupidity, from corruption, from disappointed ambition and inordinate thirst for power – that factions will be formed and liberty endangered."[71] In his farewell address of 1837 Jackson declared that "No free government can stand without virtue in the people and a lofty spirit of patriotism. If the sordid feelings of mere selfishness shall usurp the place which ought to be filled by public spirit, the legislation of Congress will soon be converted into a scramble for personal and sectional advantages."[72] Liberty required the cultivation of civic virtue. A healthy republic depended upon the subordination of private interests for the sake of the greater good. Jackson trusted that the majority of the people would avoid moral corruption: "Never for a moment believe that the great body of the citizens . . . can deliberately intend to do wrong."[73]

In January, 1835, Richard Lawrence unsuccessfully attempted to assassinate Jackson in the rotunda of the Capitol. By then, Whig rhetoric comparing Jackson to Caesar was so heated that Francis P. Blair, editor of the *Globe*, suggested that Lawrence might have been influenced by the orators who "had depicted the President as a Caesar who ought to have a Brutus."[74] Even after he left office, Jackson's opponents continued to liken him to a Roman emperor. When the Panic of 1837 ushered in a long depression, Representative John Pendleton Kennedy of Maryland contrasted the prosperity of 1829 with the hard times of 1837. Jackson, he said, "reversing the boast of the Roman Emperor [Augustus], might have exclaimed, at his departure from the capital, 'I have found Rome marble, and I have left it brick.'" Representative Henry A. Wise of Virginia parodied Mark Antony's funeral oration in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*: "Truly, truly, it may be said, sir, that the evil which General Jackson did lives after him."[75]

Nevertheless in 1845, Jackson pointedly refused the offer of a splendid Roman sarcophagus for his eventual remains because of its associations with kings and emperors and the aristocratic pretensions of such Roman allusions:

> I must decline accepting the honor intended to be bestowed. I cannot consent that my mortal body shall be laid in a repository prepared for an emperor or a king. My republican feelings and principles forbid it; the simplicity of our system of Government forbids it . . . True virtue cannot exist where pomp and parade are the governing passions; it can only dwell with the people, the great laboring and producing classes, that form the bone and sinew of our Confederacy.[76]

Instead of a Roman sarcophagus, Jackson preferred a simple burial. "I have prepared," he wrote, "a humble depository for my mortal body beside that wherein lies my beloved wife, where, without any pomp or parade, I have requested, when my God calls me to sleep with my fathers, to be laid."[77] Jackson died on June 8, 1845, and was buried next to his wife, Rachel, at the Hermitage, his home near Nashville, Tennessee.

Elite responses to, and critics of, Jackson's "Caesarism" were not confined to politicians. In the field of art, the painter Thomas Cole composed a series of five paintings (1833–6) entitled *The Course of Empire*. Cole clung to the eighteenth-century cyclical vision of history and he believed that the course of the United States would be shaped by universal historical forces.[78] "We see that nations have sprung from obscurity, risen to glory, and decayed. Their rise has in general been marked by virtue; their decadence by vice, vanity, and licentiousness. Let us beware," he warned.[79] Cole's paintings had a didactic purpose: he intended observers to recognize the analogies between the paradigmatic rise and fall of empires and contemporary 1830s America.

Cole's series offered an allegorical portrait of the agrarian origins of nations, their rise to imperial grandeur, their subsequent fall into corruption, tyranny, and conquest, and their end in bleak desolation. *The Course of Empire* was a general meditation on the rise and fall of empires, but many details in the central painting, *The Consummation of Empire*, evoke one empire in particular: imperial Rome (figure 1.5).[80] It depicts a purple-robed conqueror's triumphal return to a monumental white marble city. Colossal and elaborate classical architecture dominates the canvas; the harbor is filled with ships of the mercantile empire; and the goddess Minerva holding a victory figure stands on a columned pedestal to the center right. The crowned conqueror is surrounded, in Cole's words, "by captives on foot, and a numerous train of guards, senators & pictures while golden treasures are carried before him. He is about to pass beneath the triumphal arch, while girls strew flowers around."[81] Cole's triumphal procession is a visual compilation drawn from a number of sources, especially Andrea Mantegna's *Triumphs of Caesar* at Hampton Court Palace, which Cole had visited in July 1829.[82] Mantegna's painting had made the triumphs of Julius Caesar exemplary for the triumphs of all Roman generals. Cole's victorious general is certainly suggestive of Julius Caesar, and to Whigs it may well have suggested Andrew Jackson.[83]

For the motto for his series, Cole chose an excerpt from Lord Byron's *Childe Harold* that articulated the inevitable historical cycle: "First Freedom and then Glory – When that fails, / Wealth, vice, corruption." For the title of his series,

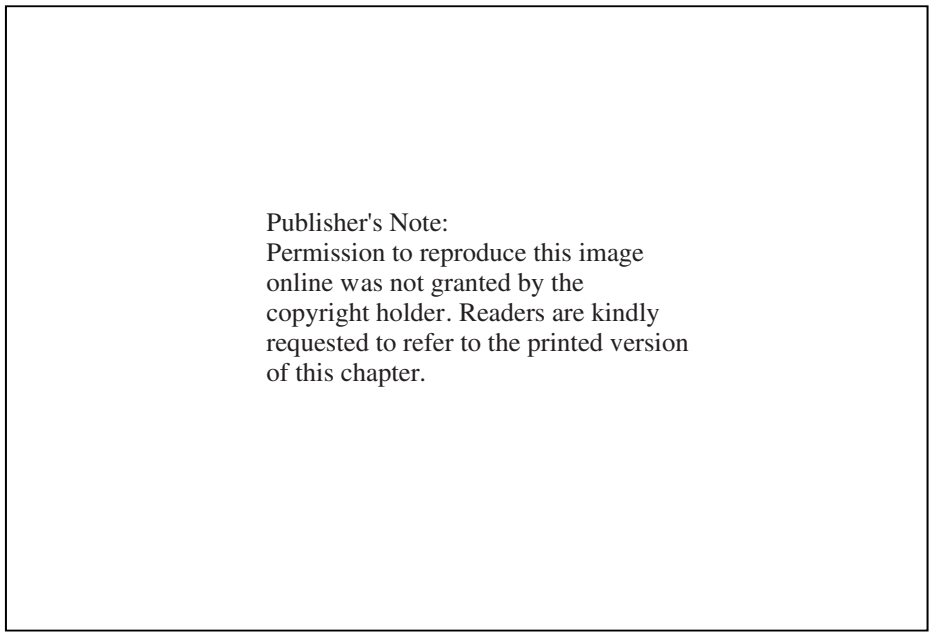
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Figure 1.5 Thomas Cole, *The Course of Empire: Consummation* (third of the series), 1835–6. Accession number 1858.3. Courtesy of The New-York Historical Society.

Cole chose a phrase from Bishop George Berkeley's poem *Destiny of America* – the idea of an unvarying cycle of imperial rise and decline:

> Westward the course of empire takes its way;
> The four first Acts already past,
> A fifth shall close the Drama with the day:
> Time's noblest offspring is the last.

Cole's negative views of empire were shaped by his pessimistic understanding of the rise and decline of empires, and the motto and the title of his series suggest that he interpreted Berkeley's poem to mean that even the New World empire remained subject to the same principles of historical causation.[84]

From Cole's conservative perspective, the popular democracy and the expansionist and commercial pursuits of the Jacksonian era seemed to signal the end of the virtuous American republic and the rise of moral corruption and tyranny.[85] Where many Jacksonian Democrats saw progress and the extension of democracy, Cole and others saw unchecked materialism, social decline, and the breakdown of order, and looked to the Roman Empire for criticism of it all.[86] There were growing gaps between rich and poor in cities. Riots and lawlessness were common. Commercial greatness and expansionism came at a heavy cost.

Margaret Bayard Smith, a contemporary of Thomas Cole's, was equally troubled by rampant commercialism and social and moral decline. She and her husband, Samuel Harrison Smith, publisher of the republican newspaper the *National Intelligencer*, moved to Washington in 1800. Margaret Bayard Smith lived in the capital for over thirty years. She experienced the social and political transformations of the Jacksonian era and she, too, saw in imperial Rome a negative parallel with Jacksonian America.[87] In the early 1830s, Smith published several short stories set in Rome in Sarah Hale's *Ladies' Magazine*. "In no period in Roman history," she informed her female readers, "did a darker gloom invest the aspect of society, than in the time of Nero, 'when virtue,' in the words of Tacitus, 'was a crime that led to certain ruin.'"[88] Most of her stories starred Roman matrons who remained virtuous even under the reign of the notoriously corrupt and decadent Emperor Nero. For Smith, the Roman matron remained an exemplary figure – even though there were now fewer women in Washington who emulated them. "The simple and frugal age of Rome," Smith wrote,

> when women were occupied with their distaffs and looms, had long passed, and the sex now partook not only of luxuries, amusement and license of society, but likewise of the political power and philosophical research. They had ceased to be the slaves, and had become the friends and companions of men . . . The social circles of Rome, at least those of the higher classes, were always composed of both sexes. Virtuous and learned women mingled with statesmen and philosophers, and imparted to society that refinement which they alone can impart. But it is with regret, the historian relates, that virtuous women were as rare as virtuous men. Arria was one of the precious few, who in a time of general corruption of morals, exhibited the qualities that have made the epithet of *Roman matron* a title of honor.[89]

Caroline Winterer has suggested that Smith may be looking back nostalgically in this passage "to her own days as a young Washington wife, circulating in elite society, to call for a return to the days when both men and women participated in learned, political conversation."[90] Like other elite republican women, Smith had hosted dinners and social gatherings where they engaged in political and literary discussions, termed "parlor politics" by Catherine Allgor.[91] But the social and political influence of these elite republican women waned under the new democratic administration. Under Jackson's presidency, the wives of former officials and power brokers no longer had access to the social and political circles of the administration.[92]

Smith's fictional Roman heroines resist the deplorable decline of Roman Republican values and ideals in the age of the emperors. They are strong, courageous, chaste, and pious. They uphold the virtues of the Roman Republican matron in a time of moral and political corruption. But Roman matrons were now out of fashion in the nation's capital. "In the days of Ancient Rome," commented one newspaper editorial,

> mammas – or *matrons* as the old-fashioned name then was – were proud of being the mothers of republicans – of hardy sons . . . [and] of highminded daughters . . . but now mammas are proud of nothing but lily complexions too fair for the sun to look upon, graceful dancing, tight waists, jewels, fashionable languor, and becoming uselessness. There are no Arrias among us . . . it is so much more easy to be a dandy or a belle, than to be a republican of the Roman; ay! Or the Jefferson school.[93]

Republican women like Margaret Bayard Smith found they were marginalized and increasingly out of step with the times.[94]

Both Margaret Bayard Smith and Thomas Cole were concerned at the erosion of gentility and old lines of authority and dismayed at the decline of civic virtue, which both believed had so far kept the republic intact. As their fiction and paintings respectively drew a parallel between Roman decline and 1830s America, their works expressed a continuing anxiety within American culture that was at odds with the nation's exuberant new pursuit of "manifest destiny," a view that dismissed the relevance to the United States of the cyclical view of history and the rise and fall of nations and empires.

In 1839 the editor of the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, John L. O'Sullivan, asserted that the United States has "in reality, but little connection with the past history of any of them [other nations], and still less with all antiquity, its glories, or its crimes. On the contrary, our national birth was the beginning of a new history . . . Who, then, can doubt that our country is destined to be the great nation of futurity?"[95] Instead of repeating ancient history, America would develop and progress upward from it. Many Americans now shrugged off the relevance to their republic of ancient history. Instead of cycles or spirals, there could be a tale of progressive linear change over time. In 1838, the popular actor Edwin Forrest, an ardent supporter of Andrew Jackson, gave a speech at the Independence Day celebrations in New York. The Revolution, said Forrest, marked "the most august event which ever constituted an epock in the political annals of mankind."[96] According to the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* of September of the same year, Forrest's patriotism was "imbued with the philanthropy which saw America as designed by her example to shed the light of her moral truth into the remotest corners of the earth for man's emancipation."[97] Not long after this, in 1845, John L. O'Sullivan coined the term "manifest destiny" in his arguments for the annexation of Texas. "Manifest destiny" quickly came to mean not only that America was exempt from the cycles of history, but that the American achievement was the divinely ordained culmination of the westward movement of progressive civilization. America's unique combination of democracy, capitalism, and Christianity was destined to spread across the continent and to serve as a shining model for all nations to emulate. Conquest, expansion, and material progress were in vogue.

Given this predominant mood and rhetoric of the times, it is perhaps not surprising, as Andrew Wallach has told us, that the critic from the *New-York Mirror*

who reviewed Thomas Cole's *Course of Empire* series missed Cole's intended analogy. The critic suggested that "democracy was the *antidote* to the cyclical process . . . democracy and material progress would bring about an 'empire of love' the result of mankind's advance along 'the road to greater and greater perfection'."[98] The cycle of decline and fall could be checked by the extension of American democracy. In 1847 a contributor to *De Bow's Review* wrote "Westward is the tide of progress, and it is rolling onward like a triumphant Roman chariot, bearing the eagle of the republic or empire, victorious ever in its steady but bloodless advances."[99] Evidently, Rome could be simultaneously dismissed as irrelevant and then re-invoked to describe America's march of empire. By the end of the 1840s, the phrase the "course of empire" was merging with "manifest destiny." Angry invocations of Julius Caesar as an exemplar to avoid, and evocations of the values of the aristocratic Roman Republic, had faded. Many Americans now believed that democratic America could surpass Rome's achievements and was exempt from decline. Others, however, as we shall see in the next chapter, were not so confident in the endless progress of the republic without a major intervention to stem the growing concentration of wealth.

Notes

1 Waldo (1777).
2 Addison (2004), II, 1, 97–100.
3 Joseph Addison's play was first performed in London in 1713. Addison wrote during a time of political upheaval and intense factional conflict between Whigs and Tories over political control. Addison was politically associated with the Whigs, "yet *Cato* is remarkable for the manner in which both Whigs and Tories embraced it as sympathetic to their causes; leaders of both parties were present at the opening performance, and Alexander Pope's account of the premiere describes Whigs and Tories competing to appropriate the play to their own causes." Addison (2004), xiii.
4 There were nine American editions of *Cato* before 1800 and eight more in the nineteenth century.
5 Plutarch was widely read in eighteenth-century America in the English translation by John Dryden. For a discussion of the influence of Plutarch in America, see Reinhold (1984), 250–64. Cato the Younger was the great-grandson of Marcus Porcius Cato (d. 149 BCE). The two Catos are referred to as Cato the Elder and Cato the Younger to distinguish them from each other.
6 After Caesar crossed the Rubicon in 49 BCE, he was formally declared an enemy of the Republic. Caesar went on to defeat Pompey and his army at the battle of Pharsalus in 48 BCE but Cato did not concede defeat, and he and Metellus Scipio escaped to the province of Africa to continue resistance. Caesar defeated the army led by Metellus Scipio in 46 BCE and Cato committed suicide.
7 Addison (2004), II, 3, 8–13.
8 The importance of the play for Washington and others is illustrated by the fact that he had it performed despite a congressional resolution condemning stage performances

as contrary to republican principles. "Moreover, in 1783, when his officers encamped at Newbergh, New York, threatened to mutiny – as Cato's troops had done in the play – Washington appeared before them and quite self-consciously shamed them into abandoning the enterprise essentially by rehashing Cato's speech." Addison (2004), viii.

9 Addison (2004), II, 4, 61–3.

10 In 1764, James Otis called Caesar "the destroyer of Roman glory and grandeur, at a time when but for him and his adherents both might have been rendered immortal." In Patrick Henry's Stamp Act Speech of 1765, he compared George III with Caesar, declaring: "Caesar had his Brutus, Charles the First his Cromwell, and George III [cries of 'Treason!'] may profit by their example." Adams, Otis, and Henry, quoted in Richard (1994), 91.

11 Richard (1994), 84.

12 Adams to Nathan Webb, October 12, 1755, quoted in Richard (1994), 77–8.

13 Ibid.

14 Adams, *Diary*, June 20, 1779, quoted in Richard (1994), 78. Ennius (239–169 BCE) wrote of the expansion of Rome's sway in the Mediterranean.

15 H. L. Watson (1990), 45.

16 Livy (1987), 1.1: 34.

17 John Adams to John Quincy Adams, Butterfield (1963), vol. 4, 117.

18 This American relationship to Roman antiquity illustrates what Hobsbawm has called "the invention of tradition," by which he means the ways in which groups, usually nations, establish a connection with a usable past as a means of constructing identity, validating present actions and values, and fostering group cohesion. Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983).

19 Addison (2004), IV, 4, 81–2. Wills (1984), 132; Richard (1994), 60.

20 Sewall (1801), 107–10. Of the five American printings of *Cato* from 1779 to 1793, four contain Sewall's epilogue.

21 Addison (2004), II, 3, 40–2.

22 For example, excerpts from Addison's *Cato* are in J. Dana (1792), N. Webster (1801), and Bingham (1797). Bingham's *Columbian Orator* included Sewall's epilogue, 69–70.

23 Bingham (1797), 58.

24 J. Dana (1792), section on modesty, 53. Dana may well have had the following passage from Seneca in mind: "Cum iam profeceris tantum ut sit tibi etiam tui reverentia, licebit dimittas paedagogum: interim aliquorum te auctoritate custodi – aut Cato ille sit aut Scipio aut Laelius aut alius cuius interventu perditi quoque homines vitia supprimerent, dum te efficis eum cum quo peccare non audeas." ("And when you have progressed so far that you have also respect for yourself, you may send away your attendant; but until then, set as a guard over yourself the authority of some man, whether your choice be the great Cato, or Scipio, or Laelius, – or any man in whose presence even abandoned wretches would check their bad impulses. Meantime, you are engaged in making of yourself the sort of person in whose company you would not dare to sin.") Seneca (1917), *Epistle* 25.6. Thanks to John Dugan for tracking down this Seneca passage for me.

25 Addison (2004), Prologue, 1–4.

26 Diderot quoted in Honour (1977), 80.
27 Honour (1977), 80–1; Winterer (2002), 28–9; and Wills (1984), 102.
28 Wills (1984), 115–22.
29 Wills (1984), 111–12; Winterer (2002), 47.
30 Addison (2004), I, 1, 79–82.
31 Addison (2004), II, 4, 59–60.
32 See Winterer (2007), 1–102.
33 J. Dana (1792), 121–2.
34 Plutarch (1918), *Brutus*, 53.5. In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, she dies after swallowing "fire."
35 Gelles (1992).
36 Addison (2004), I, 4, 151–5.
37 Hicks (2005), 2.
38 See Teute (1999), 89–121, and Winterer (2005), 53–60.
39 Hicks (2005), 21.
40 Warren (1980), 208–12 at 208. Poem entitled *To Honorable J. Winthrop* "who, on the American Determination, in 1774, to suspend all Commerce with Britain, (except for the real Necessaries of life) requested a poetical List of the Articles the Ladies might comprise under that Head." For a biography of Warren, see Zagarri (1995).
41 For an analysis of this play, see Winterer (2005), 54–5.
42 Wills (1984), 13.
43 Ibid., 80–2. Commenting on Mason Locke Weems's popular and long-lived *Life of Washington*, first published in 1800, Wills wrote that Weems was certain that "a description of a hero could produce heroes among his readers." Wills (1984), 110.
44 Huet (1999), 53–69.
45 G. S. Wood (1992), 368.
46 For articles exploring the shifting meanings of Julius Caesar from antiquity to the present in Europe and the United States, see Wyke (2006a).
47 Adams in a letter to Thomas Jefferson in 1819 quoted in Richard (1994), 54.
48 Adams quoted in Miles (1968), 365–6. Tullia was Cicero's beloved daughter.
49 Wallach (1994), 92.
50 *Annals of Congress*, 15th Cong., 2nd sess., 645–55. Clay quoted in Miles (1968), 363.
51 Ibid., 647. Clay quoted in Miles (1968), 363.
52 H. L. Watson (1990), 9.
53 *Register of Debates*, 23rd, 1st session, 1525, 3407, quoted in Miles (1968), 369.
54 "From Mr. Noah's Paper," *Connecticut Courant* (September 16, 1828): 3.
55 "Infamous!" *Eastern Argus Tri Weekly* (October 21, 1833): 2. It is unclear whether "the plundered treasures of Asia" is an error (for Gaul) or whether Genet was thinking of Caesar's time in Alexandria.
56 Jefferson to Adams, December 10, 1819, quoted in Burstein (1996), 39.
57 Jackson quoted in Wilentz (2005), 4.
58 Nineteenth-century Americans used the terms "patrician" and "aristocrat" interchangeably for a member of the Roman political elite, and "plebeian" for commoner/non-elite.
59 Hone quoted in Wallach (1994), 93.

60 "On presidential usurpation," *Farmer's Cabinet* (September 28, 1832): 2.
61 *Niles' Weekly Register* (April 16, 1831), quoted in Miles (1968), 368.
62 "Brutus; Caesar; United States; Gazette; Letter; Stephen Simpson; People," *Baltimore Patriot* (August 8, 1831): 2.
63 Jackson was also sometimes compared to Napoleon. Davison (1975), 23; Stansell and Wilentz (1994), 17.
64 Note the irony of identifying Jackson as Julius Caesar. Caesar after all was a patrician, in the technical sense, an aristocrat who traced his family history to Aeneas and the kings of Rome; Jackson was a common man.
65 "We are, said he, in the midst of a revolution, hitherto bloodless, but rapidly tending towards a total change of the pure republican character of the government, and to the concentration of all power in the hands of one man. . . . The measure adopted by the President is without precedent. I beg pardon – there is one; but we must go down for it to the commencement of the Christian era. It will be recollected by those who are conversant with Roman history, that, after Pompey was compelled to retire to Brundusium, Caesar, who had been anxious to give him battle, returned to Rome, 'having reduced Italy,' says the venerable biographer, in sixty days – [the exact period between the removal of the deposits and that of the commencement of the present session of Congress, without the usual allowance of any days of grace] – without bloodshed." Clay quoted in Benton (1854), 402–6.
66 Benton (1854), 411–12.
67 Editorial, *Baltimore Patriot* (August 11, 1834).
68 Jackson was officially censured by Congress for his actions while in power.
69 Jackson quoted in Benton (1854), 427.
70 Jackson to Andrew Jackson, Jr., April 15, 1834, quoted in Miles (1968), 374.
71 Jackson quoted in H. L. Watson (1990), 10.
72 Ibid., 45.
73 Ibid., 10.
74 "Attempt to assassinate the president" and "The case of Richard Lawrence," *Niles' Weekly Register* (February 7, 1835): 391. As early as 1820, Jackson was described as a Caesar needing a Brutus. See *Daily National Intelligencer* (April 4, 1820): 4. Carl Richard has pointed out that the Whig attempts "to brand Jackson as another Caesar were so numerous and passionate that one newspaper blamed the first presidential assassination attempt in American history on the overheated rhetoric." Richard (2003), 177.
75 Pendleton and Wise quoted in Miles (1968), 373.
76 Jackson in Bassett and Matteson (1926–35), vol. 6, 361–3. Letter to Jesse Duncan Elliott, March 27, 1845.
77 Ibid.
78 A. Miller (1993), 25.
79 Cole quoted in Wallach (1994), 93.
80 A. Miller (1993), 30; Stansell and Wilentz (1994), 18–19. Cf. Barringer's suggestion that Cole's city could also be read as "a parodic vision of Imperial London." Wilton and Barringer (2002), 53.
81 Cole quoted in Wilton and Barringer (2002), 102.
82 Parry (1970), 103–4.

83 Whig critical comparisons of Jackson to Caesar were well known. Modern critics have read Cole's series as a Whig allegory. A. Miller (1989), 71–76; Stansell and Wilentz (1994), 16; and Wallach (1994), 94.
84 Wallach (1994), 92, and note 195 on pages 109–10; A. Miller (1989), 80–1.
85 Stansell and Wilentz (1994), 10.
86 A. Miller (1993), 34–7.
87 I rely here on Winterer (2007), 138–41; (2005), 53–60; and Teute (1999).
88 M. B. Smith (1835), 134, quoted in Winterer (2007), 139–40.
89 M. B. Smith (1832b), 341, quoted and discussed by Winterer (2005), 58–9.
90 Winterer (2005), 58.
91 Allgor (2000).
92 Further discussions in Winterer (2005) and Teute (1999).
93 "A word for the mammas: Arria." *Workingman's Advocate* (February 26, 1831): 3.
94 In Teute's words, "With the rise of Jacksonian democracy, Roman matrons departed the stage." Teute (1999), 121.
95 O'Sullivan (1839), 426.
96 Forrest in the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, quoted in Parker (1992), 17.
97 Ibid.
98 Emphasis added. Wallach (1994), 95.
99 DeBow (1847), 31. For more examples of positive comparisons to the Roman Empire see A. Miller (1989), 75–6.

2

Working Men's Heroes

If the Whigs in the Senate saw President Andrew Jackson as an American Caesar, Democrats considered Jackson to be the representative of the American plebeians. Democrats viewed the long struggle of the Roman plebeians against "aristocratic" political, economic, and social domination as the main thread in Rome's republican history relevant to their concerns. In the late eighteenth century, Addison's *Cato* had appealed to the aspirations of both aristocrats and the common man and woman for liberty from the British Caesar, but in the 1820s–1840s Roman-themed plays speak more directly to the formation of the identity of the emerging Democratic Party and reveal strands of democratic, as opposed to merely republican, ideology. Reflecting the passions of the times, James Sheridan Knowles's 1821 play *Virginius*, Robert Montgomery Bird's 1831 *The Gladiator*, Robert Penn Smith's 1831 *Caius Marius*, Louisa Medina's 1835 *The Last Days of Pompeii*, and Nathaniel Bannister's 1836 *Gaulantus* all feature protagonists who revolt against the Roman aristocratic establishment, assert the power of the people over the aristocracy, and celebrate resistance to oppression.[1]

Elsewhere we find a similar shift in the use of Roman references away from praising Roman aristocrats to an interest in advocates for the Roman plebeians. Time and again, working men's newspapers, labor reformers, and politicians invoked two Roman tribunes, Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus and his brother Caius Sempronius Gracchus, and their reforms on behalf of the plebeians. Members of the National Reform Association (NRA), the most successful labor movement of the antebellum period, in particular drew analogies between the struggles of the Gracchi brothers to institute agrarian land reform in Rome and their own struggles to obtain homesteads from the nation's public lands. In this reading and writing of Roman history, the Roman working man's enemy was an entrenched and rapacious landholding oligarchy that had destroyed Rome's "yeoman" republic. Northern workers drew lessons from and analogies to Roman land reforms in their own struggles to establish a yeoman republic of independent farmers and artisans.

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Romans on the Stage

Plays were the popular entertainment of the early republic that movies were to become in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Theatre, which like opera was not yet considered high culture, not only offered its patrons affordable entertainment but also provided an arena where major political and social preoccupations could be expressed.[2] Acting and popular oratory drew from each other – political rallies also included poetry readings, religious exhortations, and musical performances. In the theatre, the typical layout was a tripartite division into a gallery, where poor working men, servants, blacks, and prostitutes sat; the pit, for the "middling" classes; and the boxes, for those with the most money. Walt Whitman went to the Bowery Theatre in New York City around 1840 and sat in the pit, where he was surrounded by the "slang, wit, occasional shirt sleeves, and picturesque freedom of looks and manners, with a rude, good-natured and restless movement" of firemen, mechanics, and butchers. Looking up at the Bowery's boxes, Whitman saw "the faces of the leading authors, poets, editors, of those times."[3] The theatre was a democratic cultural institution where all classes gathered together in a shared yet hierarchic public space.

One Roman who features both in the Democratic rhetoric of the Jacksonian period and as the hero of a popular play is Caius Marius, the Roman general and consul favored by the *populares* (the politicians most sympathetic to the people), and enemy and rival of Lucius Cornelius Sulla, the general favored by the *optimates* (those who favored traditional patterns of government and, hence, the ruling elites). Plutarch made the deadly rivalry between Sulla and Marius an integral cause of the end of the Roman Republic – it resulted in years of proscriptions, reigns of terror, and blood in the streets of Rome. But in Robert Penn Smith's play *Caius Marius*, these wars were presented not as vicious battles between rival warlords, but as a contest between the *populares* and the *optimates*, just as the election battle between Andrew Jackson and John Quincy Adams was seen by many as a battle between the American "plebeians" and the "aristocrats."[4] A typical example of how supporters of Jackson viewed the election as a fight between the people and the aristocracy is this resolution adopted at a convention in Halfmoon, Sartatoga County, New York.

> Resolved, that the cause of Jackson, is emphatically *the cause of the people* – that the contest in which we are engaged, is between the *people* on the one side and the *aristocracy* on the other, between an *honest patriotism*, and *a devoted attachment to the spirit of our republican institutions*, on the one side, and an *unholy and selfish ambition*, and a *contempt of the free principles of our republic*, on the other; between the friends of the incorruptible JACKSON, and the *followers* of a corrupt and sinking administration.[5]

For Democrats Jackson was like Marius, "the people-born Consul" who upheld the "birth-rights of the people against the encroachments of an ambitious

aristocracy."[6] By analogy, John Quincy Adams was like Sulla, an "instrument of the aristocracy."[7]

Americans knew about Marius from their reading of Plutarch's life of Caius Marius and from Roman texts (in translation) that were included in lesson books used in schools. School books typically contained a famous passage from the Roman historian Sallust where Marius defends himself from criticism by the Roman elites for his humble birth and lack of a polished education by pointing to his hard-earned military honors:

> He has no statues, they cry, of his family. He can trace no venerable line of ancestors. What then? Is it matter of more praise to disgrace one's illustrious ancestors, than to become illustrious by one's own good behavior? What if I can show no statues of my family? I can show the standards, the armor, and the trappings, which I have myself taken from the vanquished; I can show the scars of those wounds, which I have received by facing the enemies of my country. These are my statues. These are the honors I boast of. Not left me by inheritance, as theirs: but earned by toil, by abstinence, by valor; amidst clouds of dust and seas of blood: scenes of action, where those effeminate patricians, who endeavor by indirect means to depreciate me in our esteem, have never dared to show their faces.[8]

There is much in this speech that resonated in Jacksonian America. Democratic supporters of the president could find a number of similarities between Marius and Jackson. Like Jackson, Marius was a self-made man, rough in manners and unskilled as an orator.[9] Both men were provincials – Jackson was from Tennessee, and Marius from Arpinum, not Rome. Each earned a reputation as a ruthless general. Both men rose from humble origins to top political offices through their military skills and their popularity with the people: Jackson as president twice and Marius as consul seven times.

Both men lacked a distinguished pedigree and the education that went with it. In the passage from Sallust quoted above, Marius points to his body lacerated with wounds earned while fighting for his country as his claim to virtue and glory. Hard work and military prowess, not birth, have made Marius the man he is; so too Andrew Jackson.[10] Jackson earned his nickname Old Hickory for his toughness, discipline, and stamina. Likewise, Smith's play presents Marius as strong as an oak tree towering over the "mighty in their palaces – the hot house plants . . . who look up with envy."[11] As for education, one admirer of Jackson suggested that Jackson was a better leader because of his *lack* of a classical education, which is "unfavorable to great vigor and originality of the understanding . . . it leveled the distinctions of nature."[12] Anti-intellectualism and a lack of knowledge of classical languages could now actually endear leaders to the people.[13] A popular election rhyme succinctly sums up a key difference between the presidential contenders: "John Quincy Adams can write – Andrew Jackson can fight."[14]

Sam Houston, a lifelong friend of Andrew Jackson and a fellow Tennessean, admired Marius. Houston enlisted in the army after the outbreak of the War of

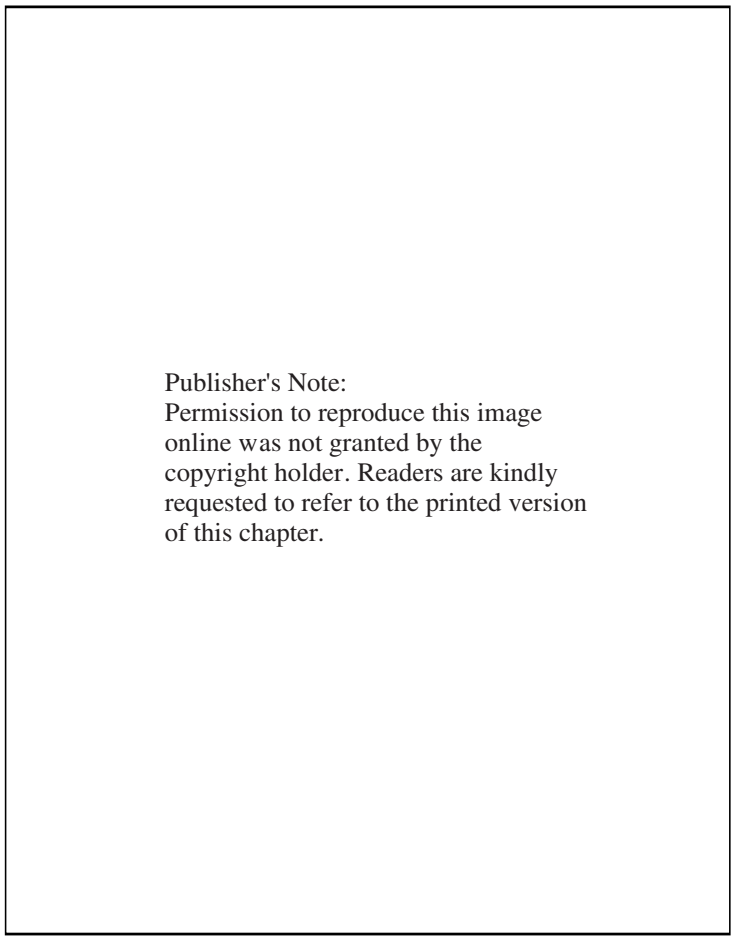
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Figure 2.1 John Vanderlyn, *Caius Marius amidst the Ruins of Carthage*, 1807. Oil on canvas. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Gift of M. H. de Young, 49835.

1812 and rose to the rank of first lieutenant before resigning in 1818 to study law. He served as a member of Congress from 1823 until 1827 and then was elected governor of Tennessee. In 1831 he commissioned a painting of himself as Marius after a painting by John Vanderlyn. Vanderlyn's painting, *Caius Marius amidst the Ruins of Carthage* (1807), portrays Marius as a stern, resolute, heroic figure (figures 2.1 and 2.2). A small copy of Vanderlyn's painting was made in 1832 and displayed together with a portrait of General Jackson on Capitol Hill.

Admiration for the Roman general and consul helps us to understand the popularity of Robert Penn Smith's play. Smith was an ardent Democrat and a friend of the charismatic actor Edwin Forrest, who played Marius.[15] *Caius Marius* opened in 1831 at the Arch Street Theatre in Philadelphia, and went on to play

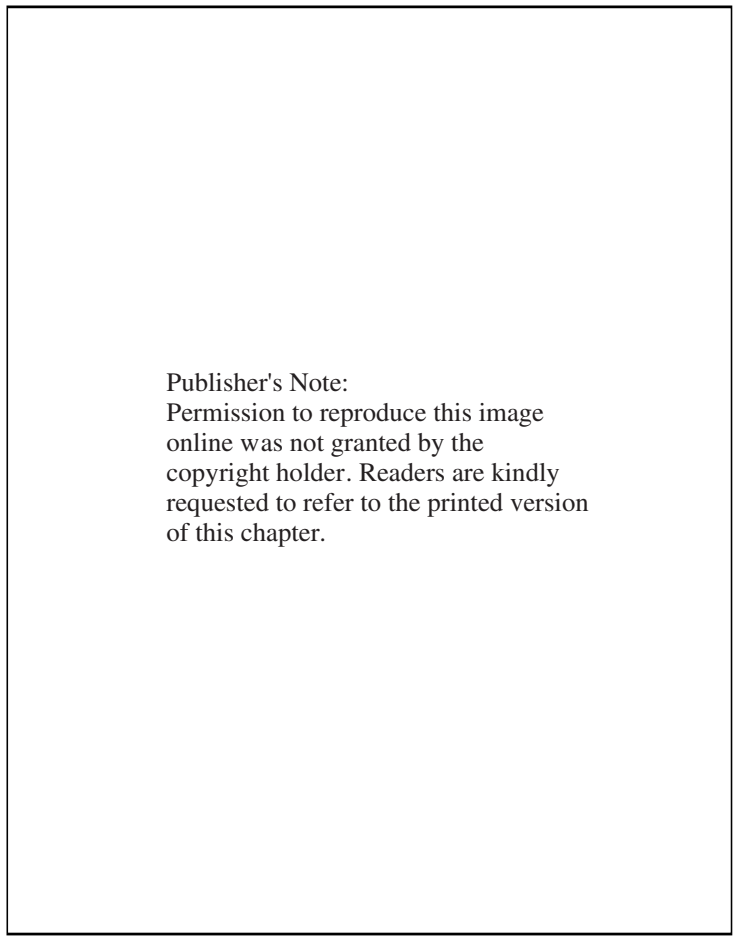
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Figure 2.2 Copy of *Sam Houston as Marius among the Ruins of Carthage* by Orlando Rouland, c.1910. Courtesy of The State Preservation Board, Austin, Texas.

to full houses in Boston, New York, and then again in Philadelphia.[16] Smith's Marius is devoid of the fierce ambition and ruthless obsession with glory that fuel the actions of Plutarch's Marius. He is instead a defender of the rights of the people, a general who cares above all for liberty.

Smith introduces Marius as the victorious general who captured and defeated Jugurtha, king of Numidia. Marius is praised as a man who has risen to power because of his military prowess and innate nobility but who lives simply with his soldiers and fights alongside them and for them. The Roman general's aim is to restore liberty to the people and his mission will not end until "Rome stands forth regenerate and free."[17] In Smith's play, Marius, as Jackson had done, confronted the Senate, the bastion of aristocracy, in order to "protect the people from the

senate, and break the iron yoke that binds their necks."[18] "The people are the fountain of all power," Marius asserts, "the people's rights must be restored to them."[19] Smith makes his Marius a champion of the working man, a fierce advocate of freedom from aristocratic oppression, Roman or American. "All the frantic ways are used to waste Rome's wealth while we are kept as if we were your slaves," cries Marius, ". . . and why is this? I call the gods to witness that the power is in our hands . . . our limbs and our minds are strong . . . Justice to the people!"[20] Speaking to the anger of the American working men in the audience at the contempt of the wealthy for honest work, Smith's Marius rebukes the arrogant Roman patricians who "as they pass the streets in full flown pride, disdain the honest artisans they meet." "Bend your unwilling necks, ye proud patricians," he demands. "And learn that in the midst of all your pomp, and vain display of ill-got, misus'd wealth Man is still man and nought can change his nature."[21]

Marius' courage and manliness earn him the affection of Martha, who tells him she prefers him to "Brutus" (an aristocrat) or "Numa" (a Roman king).[22] Although in Smith's play Marius dies at the hands of Sulla, he is not defeated: "'Tis done; and Sulla this world is thine; But for me, freedom, freedom, freedom with the gods."[23] In this telling of Roman history, Marius resists aristocratic oppression to the death and dies a martyr to the cause of liberty for the Roman (and American) working man.

In 1834 Edwin Forrest starred in another play that reflected Forrest's own Democratic sympathies and praised Roman plebeians' resistance to aristocratic domination: James Sheridan Knowles's *Virginius.* The play was clearly popular – there were productions of *Virginius* at the Bowery Theatre in 1835, 1840, 1843, and 1848. Knowles based his play on the story in Livy's early history of Rome, in which the Roman soldier Virginius kills his daughter, Virginia, in order to save her from enslavement and the lust of the tyrannical patrician Appius Claudius.[24] Appius Claudius was one of the Board of Ten (*decemviri*) who, only 60 years after the birth of the Roman Republic, were appointed to draw up a code of laws but who then refused to resign and reinstate constitutional government. Virginius' fierce example of resistance against the oppressive behavior of Appius Claudius inspired the plebeian revolt in 449 BCE, which overthrew the decemvirate and restored a government more favorable to the plebeians. Democrats in the audience who wanted to make tangible what they viewed as the egalitarian ideals of the American Revolution cheered the Roman working man's resistance to the aristocracy and the plebeians' demand for a greater share in the political process.

Men who hoped to reignite revolutionary fervor found an analogue and an inspiration in Knowles's play.[25] William Leggett, the editor of the *New York Evening Post* and critic of special-interest monopolies and moneyed privilege, asserted that: "The true designation of the two great antagonistic political divisions of society is democratick and aristocratick." Leggett and others hoped for a wider revolution in America for "the amelioration of the condition of mankind."[26] Addison's *Cato* had called for resistance against tyranny and for liberty even at the cost of

life itself. Now, Knowles's *Virginius* spoke directly to the popular insistence that liberty meant social and political equality, which must be fought for to the death. In Knowles's play, Virginius urges Roman citizens to rebel against their oppressors. "You help'd put your masters on your backs: They like their seat, and make you show your paces. They ride you – sweat you – curb you – lash you – and / You cannot throw them off with all your mettle!"[27] Roman citizens should revolt and cease allowing themselves to be "driven about by the decemvirs' lictors, like a herd of tame oxen, and with most beast-like docility."[28] Such sentiments resonated with white working men who struggled to achieve greater parity with their own "aristocratic" class. When Knowles arrived in New York in 1834 he stayed for nine months and acted in several of his own plays, including *Virginius*.[29] He also dined at the White House with President Andrew Jackson, who later remarked that he "had never shaken hands with a European [Knowles] with so much pleasure."[30]

One of the most popular plays of the nineteenth century, Dr. Robert Montgomery Bird's *The Gladiator*, also takes up the theme of resistance against oppression, in this case, Roman slavery. The play explored the revolt of the Thracian gladiator-slave Spartacus against Roman rule between 73 and 71 BCE, Rome's ruthless suppression of the revolt, and the death of Spartacus. *The Gladiator* opened in Philadelphia in 1831 and it held the stage for over seventy years.[31] At its opening "the entire male portion of the audience rose to its feet and gave it at least nine cheers" and when the curtain fell in New York "the theater was literally shaken with the energetic demonstrations of pleasure given by the spectators."[32] The play again starred Edwin Forrest and it became his signature role. He continued to play Spartacus for the next 30 years.

The Gladiator was produced when Edwin Forrest held an annual competition to write an "American" tragedy in which the hero was to be "an original of this country."[33] Forrest, like other American authors and artists of the time, sought to create an "American" literature and art.[34] In the selection of Bird's play with a hero outside the American context, Alison Futrell has pointed out that "Americanness" was "thus defined not by country of origin, nor by ethnic heritage nor even by chronology, but rather by the expression of an 'American spirit.'"[35] What, then, was the "American spirit" displayed by the Thracian slave? Spartacus' passionate fight for liberty from Roman oppression was deemed the same spirit that fuelled the colonists' rebellion against British tyranny during the American Revolution.[36] Bird's play therefore had a general appeal that could cross party and class lines.

Spartacus deserved admiration because he resisted Roman conquest and slavery. In the United States, François Furstenberg has argued, "liberty and freedom have always been defined in relation to slavery."[37] According to Furstenberg, a mythologized narrative of the American Revolution "transmitted a belief that the Revolution was above all an act of heroic resistance by a people threatened with slavery."[38] The Revolution left a "twinned legacy: a call to freedom linked with an obligation to resist. . . . A virtuous person would resist slavery, even at the cost of life itself."[39] It hardly needs to be said that this is a metaphoric use of slavery by

white men to describe their political oppression by other whites. Late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century readers used in schools contained a number of passages on the topic of slavery and liberty including several passages taken from Roman historians and from Addison's *Cato*. The speech in Tacitus' *Agricola* that Tacitus puts into the mouth of Calgacus, the leader of the Caledonians, urging his army to resist Roman subjugation, was a favorite oration. It had a specific metaphorical relevance for Americans in the early republic:

> Caledonia is yet free. The all-grasping power of Rome has not yet been able to seize our liberty. But it is to be preserved only by valor . . . Thus, my countrymen, and fellow-soldiers, suspected and hated as we ever must be by the Romans, there is no prospect of our enjoying even a tolerable state of bondage under them . . . On your behavior this day depends your future enjoyment of peace and liberty, or your subjection to a tyrannical enemy, with all its grievous consequences.[40]

Caledonian resistance to Rome was admirable because it exemplified the same ideological passions and sentiments that inspired the American Revolution. The Caledonians, like the American Revolutionaries, preferred death to slavery and bondage. Ironically, Americans now could identify with the freedom-loving ancient "Britons" who fiercely resisted Roman tyranny.

Noah Webster's school reader included Joseph Warren's second oration on the massacre in Boston delivered on March 5, 1772. In it, Warren warned his listeners against dissolution leading to contented slavery, which, he claimed, was what happened in Rome. "My Sons, scorn to be slaves!" If the colonists accepted British taxes, he concluded, "We are absolute slaves."[41] When he delivered his fifth oration on the subject on March 6, 1775, Warren wrapped himself in a toga and again passionately urged his countrymen to resist slavery. Spartacus' desire for freedom and his resistance to Roman slavery resonated with American sentiments because his actions could be popularly understood as a fight for freedom from "slavery" to the British crown. Bird's Spartacus, like Cato, Patrick Henry, and Joseph Warren (who died at the battle of Bunker Hill, shortly after giving his fifth oration), preferred death to slavery.

We can see the same ideological sentiment governing the outcome of Nathaniel Bannister's play *Gaulantus*, in which the Gauls resist to the death Roman conquest.[42] After his wife kills herself with her husband's sword rather than be captured, the invented character Gaulantus, leader of the Gauls, manages to kill the Roman general Carmitus before killing himself (figure 2.3). Gaulantus and his wife would rather commit suicide then endure conquest and slavery because, as Gaulantus says on his deathbed: "sweet liberty . . . is the sweetest gift the gods bestow." Again the message is that virtuous men and women resist to the death enslavement.[43]

The Gladiator thus appealed to a deeply rooted ideology of American freedom, but it also had a particular resonance for the white male working class for whom freedom increasingly meant freedom from economic exploitation. In Bird's play, Spartacus calls the Romans parasites and oppressors:

> Look ye Roman – there is not a palace upon these hills that cost not the lives of a thousand innocent men; there is no deed of greatness ye can boast, but it was achieved upon the ruin of a nation; there is no joy ye can feel, but its ingredients are blood and tears.[44]

The Roman slave economy relied on the brutal exploitation of men who were once free. In the United States, the distance between the wealthy elite and the working class was growing, leading to increasing social tensions. In the spring of 1831, the editors of the *Workingman's Advocate* wrote an editorial addressed to "our worthy (city) magistrates." In it, they asked for large and affordable public baths supported at the public expense "as it used to be in the best days of Rome." Why

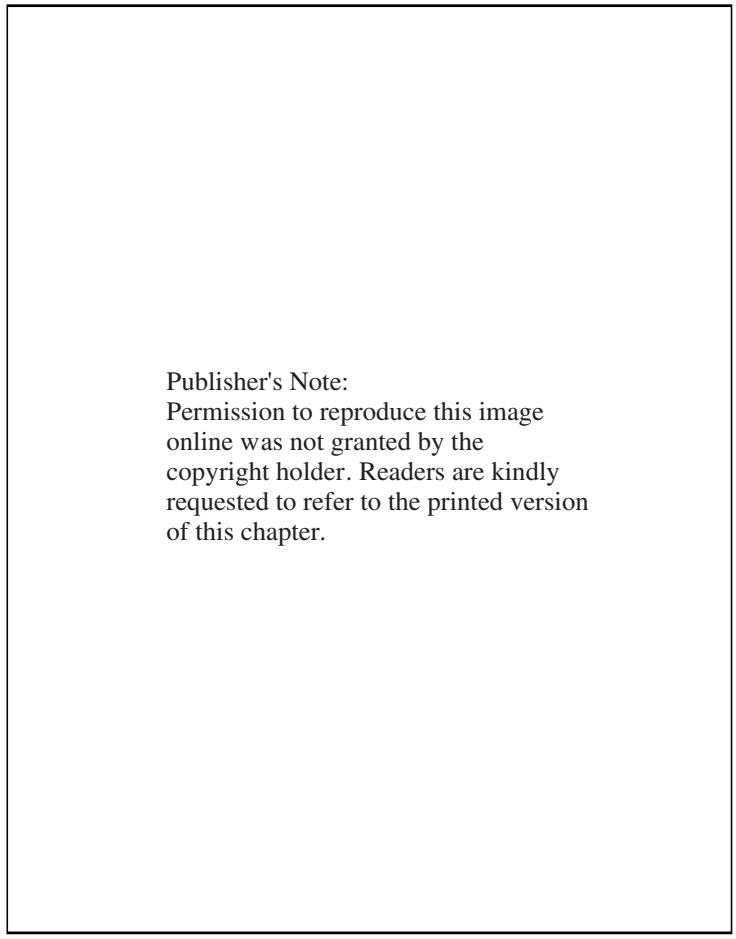
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Figure 2.3 *Gallic Chieftain Killing His Wife and Himself*, c.230–320 BCE. Hellenistic statue. Museo Nazionale Romano (Palazzo Altemps), Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome, Italy. Photo credit: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

not do something "democratic" with the people's money rather than "spending it on turtle soup" and "canvass backs [a species of duck favored by epicures] and champagne?"[45] *The Gladiator*'s sympathetic treatment of those oppressed by Rome could be understood as a metaphor for the exploitation of American workers by the men who lived in fine townhouses, drank champagne, and ate fancy soup all paid for by the labor of poor working men.

Some labor leaders and workers were becoming increasingly critical of the aggressive nature of American capitalism and its emerging social and economic order. They criticized the way labor was treated – how work and lives were degraded by factories and machines. They questioned the utility and benefits of merchant capitalism and the commercial profit motive. They were concerned with social justice and pushed for greater economic and social reforms. In the words of Edward Pessen: "Standing apart both from the frenzied contest for gain, and from the patrician criticism of it, were the era's labor leaders. . . . Every man an entrepreneur! may have been the slogan of William Leggett and other antimonopoly Jacksonians. It was not theirs. In their private behavior as in their social thinking, the labor leaders were uncommon Jacksonians."[46] Spartacus' fight against the Roman aristocrat and general Crassus modeled resistance for working men now worried about a new and pernicious form of *economic* oppression that they termed slavery.

The Working Men's movement of the 1820s and 1830s in New England and the middle states consisted primarily of Anglo-Protestant workers unhappy with the oppressive effects of market capitalism. Its members resisted the "yoke of party oppression," preferring to "select from all parties the faithful and qualified to transact the public business."[47] Its primary focus was reform of artisanal shops and an end to what labor leaders and workers called "wage slavery."[48] Capitalism, they argued, had resulted in a loss of independence and autonomy in the workplace. Work and workers were treated as commodities. There was a lack of control over hours of work, salary, and length of employment. For the workers, this was experienced as a loss of independence and as bondage to an employer and his arbitrary rules and regulations. The proliferation of markets and factories produced class conflict – workers forced to market their labor as a commodity saw their wages kept low and employment uncertain. Slavery was the metaphor that crystallized this discontent, and "wage slavery" became a rallying slogan for white working men who found themselves subordinated to capitalist employers.[49]

Louisa Medina's *The Last Days of Pompeii* gives fiery expression to the resentment of working men against their masters. In 1835, British-born playwright Louisa Medina, the wife of Thomas S. Hamblin, who managed the Bowery Theatre, adapted British author Edward Bulwer-Lytton's 1834 novel *The Last Days of Pompeii* into an apocalyptic melodramatic spectacle, which climaxed with the eruption of Vesuvius on stage.[50] The play received enthusiastic reviews and its initial 29 performances constituted the longest run at that time in the history of the New York theatre. The melodrama was frequently revived through the early 1850s.[51] In his novel, Bulwer-Lytton had criticized his own British aristocratic class by portraying

the Roman ruling aristocratic elites of Pompeii as amoral pursuers of luxury and material display. Medina, according to Nick Yablon, "theatricalized, Americanized, and radicalized" Bulwer-Lytton's novel.[52] Her melodrama draws an American/Roman analogy. The Roman villains of Pompeii stand in for parasitic factory owners whose mechanized manufacturing was degrading skilled labor and reducing the wages of artisans, mechanics, and craftsmen, the very men who filled the Bowery Theatre. In Medina's adaptation, Yablon argues, Glaucus, the Athenian hero of Bulwer-Lytton's novel, embodies the honor and pride of the oppressed artisan-craftsmen.[53] Her play culminated with the punishment of the Roman villains: Vesuvius rained a fiery death upon the exploiters of the working man. The destruction of the decadent city of Pompeii and its corrupt elites offered a satisfying allegory of the punishment of the capitalist entrepreneurs and the vindication of the artisan-craftsmen.

Wage slavery meant more than economic bondage – it degraded the worker and emasculated him. A great deal of Edwin Forrest's appeal to working men was his virility. When Forrest, as Spartacus – bare-chested, his muscles flexed and bulging – challenges the Romans: "Let them come in; we are armed," audiences went wild (figure 2.4). The line "We will make Rome howl for this" became a catch phrase for boys in the street.[54] Bird's Spartacus spoke directly to white men who were passionately egalitarian, proud, and quick to retaliate if their independence was threatened.[55] Forrest's portrayal of the gladiator-slave who takes on the might of Rome made Spartacus – and Forrest – into iconic American working men's heroes.

The Gladiator was produced amidst the beginnings of abolitionism – Nat Turner's 1831 slave revolt had only recently been violently put down and William Garrison's abolitionist newspaper the *Liberator* had just been launched. Some modern critics have therefore suggested that the play might also have been understood by audiences as a criticism of American slavery.[56] But abolitionism was a minority position in the 1830s and it is far from clear that Bird intended his play to carry an anti-slavery message. Bird's Thracian rebel is noble and generous, but Bird may not have had the same view of black slaves who revolted against their white American masters. Commenting on the Nat Turner slave uprising in Virginia, in which 55 white people were killed, Bird wrote: "If they had had a Spartacus among them to organize the half a million of Virginia, the hundreds of thousands in the [other] states, and lead them on in the Crusade of Massacre, what a blessed example might they not give to the world of the excellence of slavery!"[57] Bird is ambiguous here regarding his sympathy for the American slaves' cause but clearly shows that he feels the slaves failed to emulate the noble virtues of his hero. In any case, as abolitionism gained support in the North over the course of the 1840s and 1850s, the play might have come to be understood by some as sympathetic to the abolitionist movement.[58] In the 1830s, however, while an uprising by Thracian gladiators against Roman slavery in a play clearly appealed to working men and the democratic sympathies of supporters of Andrew Jackson, it is far from clear that the audiences would have read it also as a comment on

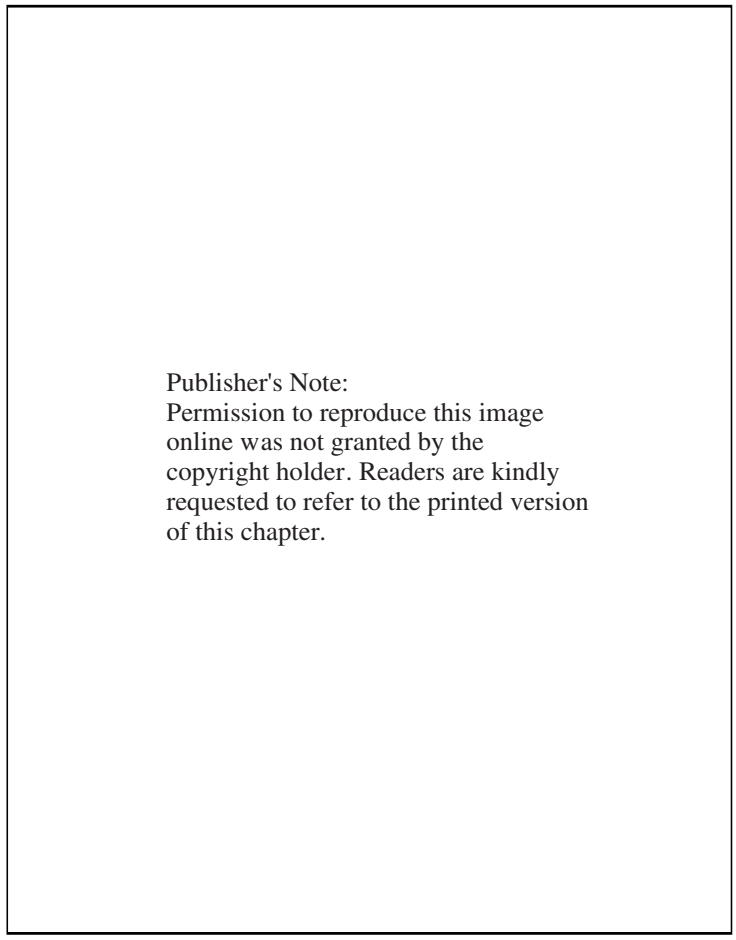
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Figure 2.4 Edwin Forrest as Spartacus, *The Gladiator*, c.1830s. Courtesy of the Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

the recent uprising by African slaves and their descendants against their American owners. The metaphor of slavery that white Americans employed to describe their political or economic oppression legitimated and inspired resistance among whites, but when black chattel slaves – as opposed to figurative white slaves – revolted in the Nat Turner rebellion their acts were described as a massacre and the participants called bloodthirsty savages.[59] Certainly, when Bird's play toured in the South, it was well received by the white audiences.[60] As in the North, Southerners could valorize Spartacus' slave revolt, because it was deemed to embody the spirit of 1776, without feeling obliged to draw uncomfortable parallels to their own roles as slave owners. Love of freedom did not preclude white American patriots from being slave holders. "Sweet liberty" was for whites not black slaves.

Ancient and Modern Yeoman Republics

For many white workers in the North, the freedom that was threatened was their own freedom to enjoy the fruits of an expanding and increasingly prosperous nation. For the workers, rapid industrialization, merchant capitalism, and the rise of monopolies were experienced as a closing of the doors of opportunity. The promises and the principles of Jefferson's vision of a yeoman republic of independent citizen farmers, and Andrew Jackson's egalitarian white democratic republic, seemed to be slipping away from their grasp rather than materializing.[61] Some labor reformers argued that land reform offered a solution to the miseries of wage slavery. If white men were given land to farm from the public domain they could escape bondage to capitalist employers in cities and finally establish the elusive dream of a yeoman republic of independent farmers. As the economic and social divide among classes widened, the two controversial Roman politicians who argued in favor of agrarian reforms on behalf of the Roman plebeians, Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus and his brother Caius Sempronius Gracchus, emerged prominently as figures for debate, praise, and criticism in political discourse (figure 2.5). Over the course of the 1830s and through the 1850s, the Gracchi brothers were hailed as heroic spokesmen for the aspirations of Roman and American working men to have the right to till the soil and produce for themselves.

How did Americans in general and working men in particular know about Roman history and the Gracchi? Translations of Roman and Greek authors were widely available.[62] The Harper publishing firm was organized in 1817 in New York City and its first book was an English translation of Seneca's *Morals*. By the end of the 1820s, the firm was the largest book-printing establishment in the United States and it issued a series of inexpensive books called "libraries," including the Classical Library. The Classical Library had 37 titles and featured translations of the works of Cicero, Horace, Virgil, Livy, Ovid, Juvenal, and other Latin and Greek authors at an affordable price.[63] The literacy rate seems to have been high. Literacy statistics were first gathered in the Census of 1840. The percentage of people over the age of 20 who answered that they were unable to read and write (admittedly problematic since some people would not have admitted illiteracy) was 9 percent in 1840, 11 percent in 1850, and 9 percent in 1860.[64] It is instructive that in 1831 the newspaper the *Workingman's Advocate* assumed there would be a working-class readership of the Classical Library. The paper commented with approval that

> the Classical Library will furnish, in a cheap form, approved translations of the most esteemed authors of Greece and Rome, and thus afford general access to sources of knowledge which have heretofore been attainable only by a few. It will be one means of breaking down the monopoly of knowledge which has so long enabled the few to rule and oppress the many.[65]

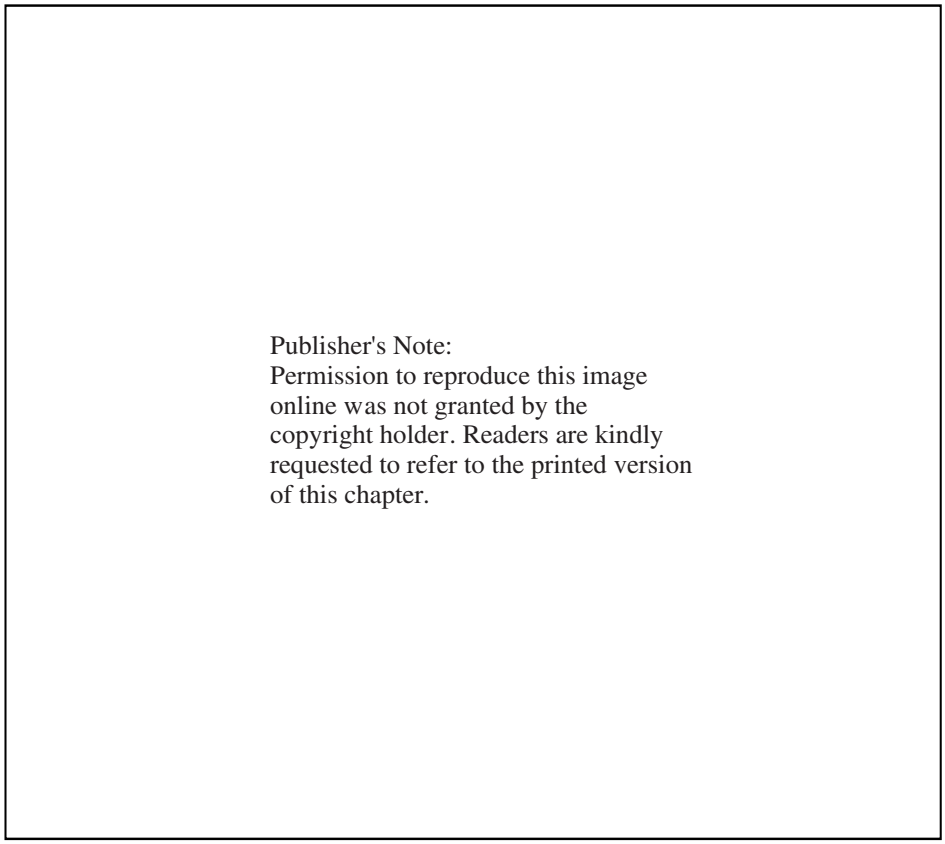
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Figure 2.5 Jean-Baptiste Claude Eugène Guillaume, *Cenotaph of the Gracchi*, 1847–8. Bronze, double bust. Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France. Photo Credit: Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY.

In addition to ancient authors, especially the ever-popular and widely read Plutarch, American school books and modern histories of Rome discussed in detail the Gracchi and their reforms. Newspapers, magazines, periodicals, and congressional speeches and debates made frequent references to the Gracchi and Roman agrarian reforms. They were talked about in taverns, and at meetings of working men, and were even dramatized in a tragedy by South Carolinian Louisa S. McCord, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Advocates and opponents of land reform, a burning issue of the time, argued over the intentions and characters of the two Roman tribunes and debated the pros and cons of their attempted reforms in Rome in minute detail. To understand antebellum references to the Gracchi, we need to look carefully at the lives and activities of the Gracchi brothers as described in the sources our American commentators read. We then can turn to the economic and political developments

that shaped the antebellum period and how the two brothers were deployed as models in the highly contentious pre-war period.

The Gracchi in Rome

Early in their history, Romans established the custom of putting up for sale by auction some of the land gained by wars of conquest while the rest was made common land (*ager publicus*). The common land was given to the poor, who were allowed to cultivate it on payment of a small rent to the public treasury. Over time, the rich began to outbid and drive out the poor by offering higher rentals for the public land. In response, the plebeians demanded that their agrarian concerns be addressed by the patricians. This resulted in the *Lex Licinia* or Licinian Law of 367 BCE, which forbade any one individual to hold more than 500 *iugera* (about 310 acres) of public land. This law was largely ignored by the wealthy, who subverted it by using the names of fictitious tenants to transfer many of these holdings to themselves, and then openly seized or transferred the greater part of the land into their own names to create huge estates. This situation grew worse as larger and larger Roman armies began to fight longer wars in more distant lands, which made military service difficult for citizen-farmers, the traditional backbone of the legions. The outcome was a rapid decline in the numbers of free farmer small-holders all over Italy, their place as agricultural workers being taken by foreign slaves captured in Rome's overseas conquests. Plantations latifundia replaced hundreds of thousands of independent small-scale proprietors, many of whom ended up as the dispossessed and unemployed living in the slums of Rome.[66] It was this situation that first Tiberius Gracchus and then his brother Caius Gracchus attempted to address.[67]

Tiberius Gracchus was from an aristocratic family in Rome. His father had been consul and censor, the two highest magistracies in Rome. His mother, Cornelia, was the daughter of Publius Cornelius Scipio, who had defeated Hannibal and the Carthaginians in the Second Punic War. After his celebratory military victory parade (triumph) in Rome, Scipio added the name Africanus to his other names, immortalizing his victory for his descendants. Plutarch tells us that when traveling through the Italian countryside, Tiberius Gracchus observed at first hand the dire conditions of Italian peasants and farmers. This experience so moved him that he determined to address and alleviate the human misery he had seen in Italy.

> "The wild animals of our Italian countryside have their dens," he would say. "Each of them has a place of rest and refuge, but those who fight and die for Italy have nothing – nothing except the air and the light. Houseless and homeless they roam the land with their children and wives. And they make liars of our military commanders: 'The enemy must not be allowed near our tombs and temples,' our leaders say, to inspire their troops in battle, but none of all these Romans has an ancestral altar or

> family tomb. No, they fight and die to protect the rich and luxurious lifestyle enjoyed by others. These so-called masters of the world have not one clod of earth they can call their own."[68]

This passage from Plutarch reverberated throughout the course of the nineteenth century. Labor reformers and political activists quoted it again and again in their speeches and writings to fire up their audiences.[69] In Rome, according to Plutarch, "whenever he [Tiberius Gracchus] mounted the rostra [the speaker's platform in the Forum], with the people crowding around him, and addressed the subject of poverty, he was so formidable that no one could make a stand against him."[70] As a way of addressing the misery of many Roman citizens, following his election as tribune in 133 BCE, Tiberius Gracchus argued for the re-imposition and proper implementation of the Licinian Law. In that same year, Tiberius saw the *Lex Sempronia Agraria* or Sempronian Law passed, under which large landowners would give up their illegal acquisitions of the public land and allow the ownership to pass to those citizens who most needed the land. Members of the Senate fought back, alleging that his object in redistributing public land was really to undermine the foundations of the Republic and stir up a general uprising that would make him ruler of Rome. Two years later, powerful interests in the Senate, including a member of the Scipio family, Publius Cornelius Scipio Nasica, clubbed Tiberius Gracchus and 300 of his supporters to death and dumped their bodies into the Tiber River because, against precedent, he ran for re-election.[71]

Ten years later, Tiberius' younger brother, Caius Gracchus, became tribune. By all accounts, Caius Gracchus was a magnificent orator who could manipulate the crowd as much by his actions, gestures, and body language as by his words. When he delivered his speeches from the speaker's platform, he faced left toward the Forum proper, where the crowds of commoners gathered, rather than to the right toward the Senate house, to which in the past all popular leaders had turned when they rose to speak. In another gesture of solidarity with the people, he moved from his house on the prestigious Palatine Hill to the neighborhood near the Forum where the poor and humble lived. Championing the causes of the poor, he proposed that public lands be divided up among the poor citizens by reviving his brother's Sempronian Law. And he argued for the establishment of urban and commercial colonies in Italy at Tarentum and Capua to relieve the congestion of Rome, where many citizens, because of the abundance of slave labor, were largely unemployed. In a similar vein, he saw passed the *Lex Iunonia*, which paid to send 6,000 men to establish a new city at Carthage, destroyed by Rome 25 years earlier. In addition, to improve the lot of the poor he reduced the price of grain and proposed the establishment of public granaries.[72]

Faced with the growing popularity and reformist zeal of a second Gracchus tribune, powerful senators took matters into their own hands again. In 121 BCE the Senate passed what was later called the *senatus consultum ultimum*, a decree that allowed for a suspension of republican rights "in defense of the Republic."

It gave Roman magistrates absolute power. When Caius Gracchus led a mass protest, following the magistrates' repeal of the *Lex Iunonia*, the Senate ordered that the protest be suppressed. The consul Lucius Opimius led an armed force to confront Caius Gracchus and his followers on the Aventine Hill, one of Rome's seven hills long identified with the plebeians. They killed Caius Gracchus, decapitated his corpse, filled his skull with lead (his enemies had proclaimed that whoever should bring the head of Caius Gracchus should, as a reward, receive its weight in gold); and killed 3,000 of his supporters without trial in a violent civil eruption in the streets of Rome.

Opponents of Tiberius and Caius Gracchus accused them of sedition and attempting to usurp the Senate's power. Cicero later had particularly sharp words about their motives and denounced them as men who pandered to the rabble. After their deaths, public acknowledgment of their existence was officially proscribed but the memory of the Gracchi brothers did not die. According to Plutarch:

> The Roman people may have been cowed and oppressed at the time of the actual events, but shortly afterward showed how much they missed and longed for the Gracchi. They began to erect statues of them and to display them in prominent places; they consecrated the places where they were murdered and used to offer there the first-fruits of all the seasonal sacrifices; and many people even sacrificed to the Gracchi on a daily basis, and bowed down before their statues as if they were visiting sanctuaries dedicated to gods.[73]

Accounts of their lives and deeds lived on in popular memory for many years. For many Romans, the Gracchi brothers were heroes.

As in the Romans' own historiography, there was an ambivalent response to the Gracchi in British and American histories of Rome. The British historian Nathaniel Hooke, for example, who was hostile to the wealthy English aristocracy and sympathetic toward the common people, praised the brothers in his 1770–1 history of Rome. "Liberty and the Republick are cant-words, where the bulk of a people have neither property, nor the privilege of living by their labour," he asserted.[74] Hooke rejected the Whig interpretation of Roman history, which glorified the Roman oligarchy and vilified the Gracchi and later Julius Caesar. Hooke preferred Tiberius Gracchus to Cicero or Cato and idealized Julius Caesar as the benevolent ruler that Romans desperately needed. Quoting Cicero on Tiberius Gracchus, "he fell off from the honest party, he fell off from the Senate (*descivit a bonis, descivit a senatu*)," Hooke offers this interpretation of Cicero's words: "That is, he [Tiberius Gracchus] quitted the faction of the oppressors of their country, men determined to proceed in a course that was contrary to all law and compassion, and directly tended to enslave Rome."[75] Because of what he tried to accomplish, Hooke called Tiberius Gracchus "the most accomplished Patriot that ever Rome produced" and the two Gracchi "the two best citizens perhaps that Rome could ever boast."[76] The Scot Adam Ferguson's 1783 history of Rome,

on the other hand, was shaped by his republican bias. Ferguson countered Hooke's Tory reading of Roman history. Tiberius Gracchus, Ferguson argued, "formed a project in itself extremely alarming, and in its consequences dangerous to the peace of the republic."[77] His "assassination," Ferguson claimed, "saved the republic."[78] As for Caesar, he was a tyrant whose death should be a lesson to tyrants.

It was Ferguson's interpretation, not Hooke's, that had had the most currency with the American Revolutionary generation. In 1788, John Adams, following Ferguson, wrote:

> The distinctions of poor and rich are necessary, in states of considerable extent, as labor and good government. The poor are destined to labor; and the rich, by the advantages of education, independence, and leisure, are qualified for superior stations. The empire was now greatly extended, and owed its safety, and the order of its government, to a respectable aristocracy, founded on the possession of fortune, as well as personal qualities and public honors . . . The project [of Tiberius] seemed to be as ruinous to government as it was to the security of property, and tended to place the members of the commonwealth, by one rash and precipitate step, in situations in which they were not at all qualified to act.[79]

Adams viewed the project of the two Roman tribunes as "ruinous" because he believed their proposed reforms would erode the proper distinctions between the rich and the poor and jeopardize the security of property and the social hierarchy necessary for good government. Ferguson and Adams agreed with Cicero, who commented that:

> Tiberius Gracchus brought forward an Agrarian law. It was very acceptable to the people; the fortunes of the poorer classes appeared likely to be established by it. The nobles strove against it, because they saw that discord was excited by it; and because, as the object of it was to deprive the wealthy men of their ancient possessions, they thought that by it the republic was being deprived of its defenders. Caius Gracchus brought forward a law respecting corn. It was a very pleasing proposal to the common people at Rome; for food was to be supplied to them in abundance without any trouble. The good resisted it because they thought that its effect would be to lead the common people away from industry to idleness, and because the treasury was likely to be drained by such a measure.[80]

Cicero sided with the wealthy landowners and members of the Senate who saw the popularity of the Gracchi and their reforms as posing a threat to the Senate's control of the Republic. As for Caius Gracchus' grain distribution program, Cicero, like modern critics of welfare, argued that state aid to the poor would only encourage laziness and moral decline in the populace. In Cicero's and John Adams's minds, the careers of the Roman tribunes and their agendas for reform paved the way for the rise of demagogues and dictators – a distinctly conservative interpretation of the significance of the Gracchi. The framers of the Constitution would

Figure 2.6 Girls and boys learning about ancient Rome. Illustrated title page of Samuel Goodrich's *History of Ancient Rome*, 1855 edition. Public domain.

also be worried about the leveling threats of democratic forces and the dangers of democratic excesses.

However, by the 1830s, more sympathetic interpretations of the Gracchi's tribunates were becoming known. Barthold Georg Niebuhr's *History of Rome*, for example, was translated into English in 1828 and became one of the most influential histories of Rome of the nineteenth century, its influence apparent in standard school texts such as Samuel Goodrich's *A Pictorial History of Ancient Rome* (figure 2.6).[81] In Goodrich's popular school book, which was reprinted multiple times over the course of the nineteenth century, he gave a detailed account of the Gracchi and then summed up the careers of the Roman tribunes:

> Thus fell, Caius Gracchus, who is usually censured by historians as guilty of sedition. Whether the two brothers were actuated by ambition or patriotism, in the promulgation of the agrarian law, is not, perhaps, very easy to determine, but it appears that justice was on their side, and the sedition was that of the senate against the Gracchi. . . . With the Gracchi perished the real freedom of Rome. From this time the power of the state was wielded by a corrupt and insolent aristocracy.[82]

In contrast to Ferguson and Adams, Niebuhr and Goodrich portrayed the Gracchi as heroic men who tried to enact needed reforms and were unjustly killed by an arrogant and greedy aristocracy. In Niebuhr's *Lectures on Roman History*, Niebuhr wrote "of purer intentions than Tiberius Gracchus, no man could ever have been."[83] The Roman Senate, however, "railed against him as a mutinous fellow who was actuated by the most detestable motives."[84] Niebuhr dismissed accusations that Tiberius Gracchus wanted to rule Rome. The reports that he wanted to be king, Niebuhr asserted, were made by men who "well knew the whole to be a lie."[85] As for Caius Gracchus, he was "upright and pure, like Tiberius, but passionate."[86] Commenting on the slaughter of the partisans of Caius Gracchus, he called it a "war of extermination . . . it was a downright butchery."[87] Niebuhr's sympathies were with the free farmers of Rome who possessed what he viewed as the best of the Republican Roman virtues, and he admired the Gracchi for speaking out on their behalf.

References to the Roman reformers and Rome's agricultural policies helped frame debates among Northern workers, reformers, and concerned citizens on how best to address troublesome conditions in the young American republic. As early as 1814, Senator John Taylor of Virginia had asserted that just as "Roman aristocrats had aggrandized themselves through warfare, by monopolizing conquered territory," so, too, were American financial elites seeking to increase their power. "A gradual monopoly of lands and wealth overturned the Roman Republic. By assailing it in time, it might have been suppressed. The murder of the Gracchi is a proof that usurpation can only be corrected in its infancy and that fraudulent acquisitions will perpetuate any crime for self-defense."[88] According to this interpretation of Roman Republican history, the critical moment for the Roman Republic – and the fate of the Roman free worker and farmer – had been the era of the Gracchi. The danger to the Republic long preceded Julius Caesar. The real threat was from the greed and obstinacy of the Roman "aristocrats."

Working men in America's industrializing North pointed to what they perceived as a constant in Rome's Republican history: the struggles of the Roman masses to win political, social, and economic rights from the ruling Roman elites – and warned that American working men were facing comparable struggles in their efforts to obtain economic and social equality. "The key flaw in Rome was the division of its citizens into patricians and plebeians," wrote one contributor to the *Workingman's Advocate*, ". . . and the plebeians striving to surmount barriers which shut them out from a just participation in the superintendence and

management of the national affairs, and struggling after those rights which were insultingly withheld by those haughty monopolists."[89] From the American worker's point of view, the enemy in Rome as in America was the moneyed elites. "That all men are born free and equal, and that all are entitled to equal rights, privileges, and immunities is a truth as little relished by the aristocrats of the present day as it was of old by the Tories of the revolution, or the patricians of ancient Rome," asserted another contributor to the *Workingman's Advocate*.[90] Adopting the language of the times, workers referred to Roman elites as "monopolists," or "tyrants," or the "aristocracy," terms used by the workers to describe their own enemy class in the United States. Workers identified with the struggles of the Roman plebeians; New York City labor reformer Levi Slamm even named his newspaper the *Plebeian*. The Roman general and consul Caius Marius again appears as a champion of the people in the pages of the radical newspaper the *Subterranean*. In 1845, Mike Walsh, the pugnacious editor of the New York paper and charismatic leader of a gang of Bowery radicals called the Spartan Band, printed Caius Marius' speech defending himself from Roman upper-class criticism of his humble background and lack of polished education. Walsh was a labor organizer and political radical who spoke openly about class conflict. "What is capital," Walsh asked his readers, "but that all-grasping power which has been wrung by fraud, avarice, and malice from the labor of this and all ages past?" His newspaper declared itself "uncompromising in its support of the working class and merciless in its exposure of corruption."[91] Walsh heartily recommended Marius' speech to his newspaper readers for its robust and eloquent defense of the self-made man:

> Let every true Sub carefully read the following speech. It is as applicable to the present day as it was to the times during which it was delivered. It will be seen by it that there were Hunkers among the Romans too, and that the overbearing insolence and audacious impertinence of worthless wealthy imbeciles towards men of soul, genius and valor immediately around us, is not confined to any age or country. If Caius Marius were alive today he would be a Sub.[92]

As in Rome, so in America: arrogant elites oppress the worthy working classes. Here Walsh inducts Marius as an honorary member into his gang of Bowery Boy radicals, men who were angry at upper-class political and economic oppression.

"The time has arrived," wrote George Henry Evans in 1834, "when the people of the United States must decide whether they will be a Republic in fact, or only a Republic in name."[93] Evans, a radical printer and editor, set up the *Workingman's Advocate* when he became involved in the Working Men's movement.[94] Newspapers had proliferated over the course of the first half of the nineteenth century and were read by all classes.[95] Evans's paper flourished until 1837, then again from 1844 to 1849. The paper had an educational message and political mission: ruling elites are corrupting and degrading the Revolution and workers must take

action to salvage and make tangible its ideals. The pages of the *Workingman's Advocate* warned its readers that:

> Your privileges will be arrested, and your rights destroyed, whenever an Aristocracy arises, which will ever be adverse to and incompatible with liberty and equality. The great engine of power with the few, is, in this country, a moneyed corporation . . . It is every where the same – Greece fell, Rome perished, and Carthage was destroyed from the innumerable ills produced by an oligarchy of miscreants . . . Let the Democracy exert their abilities to crush the spirit of intolerance, and the tyrannical sway of the aristocracy.[96]

Evans urged "the hardy yeomanry and workingmen of America" to resist the American incarnation of the perennial attempts of an oligarchy to oppress the freedom of the working man. Today, as in antiquity, wrote "Gracchus," in the *Workingman's Advocate*, an "aristocracy of avarice" oppressed working men.[97] Rather than signing the name of Cicero, Cato, or Brutus to editorials in working men's newspapers, American workers preferred signing the name of Gracchus.[98]

According to George Henry Evans, the Working Men's movement was "hardly second in importance to the revolution which separated these states from Great Britain. That revolution secured to the people the *means* of obtaining Equal Rights; the Working Men of New York, in 1829, first thought of turning those means to account."[99] White American men may have won political rights but there were other barriers to be surmounted and more benefits to obtain.

How could working men be free from economic bondage? Emancipation from wage slavery would come about, according to machinist Thomas Skidmore and newspaper editor George Henry Evans, through land reform. In 1829 Skidmore had published *The Rights of Man to Property!* In it he called for a social revolution through the confiscation and redistribution of land. Skidmore's position was too radical for most working men. Although few embraced his views, many opponents of land reform would refer to all attempts at land reform as "agrarianism," a code word for Skidmore's land redistribution scheme. This quickly became a potent way to demonize any attempts at agrarian reform.[100]

Evans's position was more moderate than Skidmore's, as was the position of the *Workingman's Advocate*. Evans made free land, rather than land redistribution, a political issue in the 1830s. Distancing himself from Skidmore's views, Evans offered a three-point program by which a national reform might be achieved: "free public lands to be given to actual settlers, . . . limitation of the amount of land held by an individual, and exemptions of homesteaders from debt."[101] This was the basis of the NRA, a movement that coalesced in 1844. It brought together farmers, craftsmen, and workers in the antebellum North.[102] NRA members wanted to regain the independence and self-sufficiency lost with the emergence of wage-labor capitalism.[103] They believed that man had a natural right to a piece of land

and they thought that Eastern working men should be given homesteads of 160 acres from the public lands. Wage slavery would end when man's "natural right" to the soil was restored. The urban poor could then move from dependence to economic independence as farmers. Those who advocated land reform hoped that, when given land, factory "slaves" would become independent producer-farmers – and their vision of an agrarian republic would be realized. Their enemies were "monopolists," those who speculated in land and thereby kept workers from enjoying it. Many members and supporters of the NRA believed they were living in an historical moment as significant for the future of their republic as the era of the agrarian reforms of the Gracchi had been for the Roman Republic.

In 1834, United States historian George Bancroft published a long essay on Roman decline in the *North American Review*, which was later republished in his *Literary and Historical Miscellanies*.[104] In it, he argued that the "ill success of the reform of Gracchus" rather than Julius Caesar had been the "destroyer" of the Roman Republic.[105] Bancroft began his essay by summarizing Plutarch's account of Tiberius Gracchus' journey through Italy, where "instead of little farms . . . he beheld nearly all the lands of Italy engrossed by large proprietors and the plough was in the hands of the slave."[106] Not only did slaves farm land that once belonged to free Romans, wrote Bancroft, they also did jobs once performed by free laborers. "The patricians took away the business of the sandal-maker," Bancroft argued, "in every community where slavery is tolerated, the poor freeman will always be found complaining of hard times."[107] The Roman plebeian was forced into idleness, Bancroft asserted, and robbed of his liberty to produce for himself.

Bancroft identified the rejection by the Roman Senate of the proposed reforms of the Gracchi as the critical moment in the fading of Rome's "democracy." What Tiberius Gracchus had attempted to do, in Bancroft's words, was to "create a Roman yeomanry."[108] The Roman tribune's aim, according to Bancroft, was "to lift the brood of idle persons into dignity; to give them land, to put the plough into their hands, to make them industrious and useful, and so to repose on them the liberties of the state."[109] According to this view, the Roman Senate's failure to provide land for the Roman free man led to his slide into dependence and indolence, which, in turn, led to a decline of the Republican virtues that produced a strong and vigorous state. Bancroft projected back onto the Roman Republic the American North's vision of the liberty-loving free laborer who tilled his fields. In Bancroft's interpretation of the Gracchi brothers, they become the defenders of a Roman "yeomanry" just as he and other supporters of land reform were the defenders of the ideal of the Jeffersonian yeomanry.

Bancroft was not alone in believing that the American present mirrored events in the Roman past. Newspaper articles and editorials reminded readers of the relevance of the era of the Gracchi to the present moment. One editorial writer in 1834 pointed passionately to the importance of that era for the fate of the Roman Republic and warned his readers that Americans were at a similar critical juncture in the history of their republic.

> Some, say, Livy, have been pleased to call the opposition of Tiberius and Caius Gracchus the faction of the Gracchi against the Senate. I rather choose to call it the faction of the Senate against the Gracchi. Ay! It *was* a faction of the Senate which ended in the death of the noble champions of popular rights – and in the prostration of republican liberties, paved the way to imperial power. God forbid that America – democratic America – should add another page to the melancholy annals of national depredations, and furnish a modern example of the prevalence of patrician insolence and Senatorial usurpations over the will and authority of the sovereign people. It shall not be – though Opimius rail out his insolence in the Senate, Caius Gracchus, though old, full of holy zeal, stalks the forum and watches over the household gods of freedom.[110]

This writer argues that it was the failure of the Roman Senate to implement the reforms of the Gracchi that "paved the way to imperial power." Instead of enacting necessary and just reforms, factions in the Senate killed the Gracchi, acts that led to privatization of the public lands, civil wars, dictatorships, and the rise of imperial rule. Clearly, some men worried that the United States was on the brink of a similar slide into ruin. Enacting reforms like those advocated by the Gracchi could arrest and prevent this slide.

Some workers saw themselves as the figurative descendents of Roman citizens exploited by monopoly-holding Romans. Speaking in support of the distribution of public lands to the needy at a meeting of the NRA, one member made the point that "the Patricians of Rome opposed this very measure in the Roman Senate" and speculated that "the Patricians of the United States Senate would [also] be found arrayed against the freedom of the public lands. It must be carried by the laboring classes themselves."[111] An editorial on July 11, 1846, summarizing the debate in the House of Representatives over the merits of the Land Graduation Bill, reported that one speaker "admirably exhibited the crimes of the Roman aristocracy in robbing the people of their lands and murdering the people's noble advocates, the Gracchi." The editorial ends with a rousing "Remember the USURPATIONS of the Roman Legislature, and suffer not the same game to be re-enacted in Free America! Death or Free Soil!!!"[112] This passionate statement surely reminded readers of Patrick Henry's famous words: "Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains, and slavery?" Henry asked rhetorically. "I know not what course others may take but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!" Access to land is linked to a fundamental human right of freedom and a natural right to subsistence, and virtue with resistance to slavery, while the Gracchi and those who support "free soil" are assimilated to America's Revolutionary heroes. Roman history fuses with Revolutionary rhetoric to animate the Free Soil movement.[113]

Land reformers mixed Enlightenment notions of the natural rights of man, Biblical imagery (particularly the language of the Old Testament), and references to the historical example of Rome in articulating their positions and aspirations.[114] A worker in 1847 wrote that:

> The great black curse [Land Monopoly] that threatens to annihilate our race stalks us. Will no powerful voice say it is enough? Six years ago I received fifty cents for making a pair of boots: now I get twenty-seven! I love to work upon the soil, but I am prevented by the curse of Land Monopoly. Must we have recourse to a revolution that will throw into the shade the mild, pleasing French Revolution? Or shall we be allowed our rights without such a bloody struggle?[115]

These words help us see the tangible impact on artisans and craftsmen of the unemployment that grew out of the Panic of 1837 coupled with the decline of real wages through the 1840s. The author urged readers to support the NRA's "Vote yourself a farm" platform and signed his letter "Spirit of Gracchus." In 1847, another worker published a poem, "Mankind's champions," praising the Gracchi and other "champions" of the people:

> Gracchus, the first martyr to the cause of reason
> Still shall thy Thought each patriot's heart inflame . . .
> Lo! There are Gracchi even now among us . . .
> Past is the hour for mirth, and scorn, and jibing –
> Heaven's balance weighs the Just against the Strong![116]

This poem combines an admiration for the Roman tribunes of the people with the millennial fervor and hopes of the evangelical Christianity of the Second Great Awakening. When Horace Greeley, Whig politician and editor of the *New York Tribune*, supported the homestead idea during the years 1845–8, he was compared to Tiberius Gracchus: "Ancient and modern tribune, or Horace Greeley and Tiberius Gracchus" read one headline.[117] Like Tiberius Gracchus, Greeley was privy to elite circles of power – he was a well-connected member of the Whig party who embraced labor's cause.[118] Greeley believed that free homesteads provided the antidote to wage slavery and that the public lands were the "great regulator of the relations of Labor and Capital, the safety valve of our industrial and social engine."[119] Greeley's support of land reform sparked a lively debate on Roman land reforms in the editorial pages of some of the nation's newspapers.

Some editorials were highly critical of the Gracchi and echoed Cicero's negative views of the brothers. In 1849, the senior editor at the *Cincinnati Atlas* asserted that Tiberius Gracchus was nothing other than a self-serving Roman who had pandered to the poor and the rabble of Rome: "those in debt, many without land, and some vagabonds, pickpockets, drunkards."[120] Commenting on Tiberius Gracchus' proposal to divide portions of the Roman public lands among the poor, he wrote that the current debate in the United States over land reform was not new; it was "nothing more than one of the Roman bastards" and all of it was against "property, order, interest, and good sense."[121] Taking the side of those senators who killed the Gracchi, he asserted – as a number of Roman authors, John Adams, and modern historians had done – that the "Roman reformers

. . . were, in fact, the means of dividing the Roman people, till the republic was destroyed and an imperial despotism re-established in its place."[122] This is the standard conservative interpretation of the Gracchi as dangerous radicals who threatened wealth, property, and the political status quo.

A defender of the Gracchi countered that they should instead be considered "among the most virtuous, most heroic, most public spirited men of whom Rome could boast."[123] In his defense of the Gracchi brothers, the editorial writer pointed out that the editor at the *Cincinnati Atlas* had made the common mistake of interpreting Roman agrarian laws as attempting to limit the amount of *private* property a Roman citizen could possess. However, the agrarian laws that culminated in the laws of the Gracchi were all attempts to define the amount of *public* land any one individual might hold.[124] The editorial writer is careful to note that neither the Roman reformers nor members of the NRA had asked landholders to give up private property. The NRA did not wish, he concluded, "to confiscate land and redistribute it as [Thomas] Skidmore had advocated."[125] Accusations that the Gracchi and the NRA threatened the security of Roman or American private property were wrong, he concluded, and should not be used to tar efforts at land reform in the United States.

Land reformers thought of themselves as the bearers of the spirit of the American Revolution, not as seditious attackers of the rights of property. The secretary of the NRA spoke of its aims "as the greatest idea brought before the world since 1776."[126] In 1845, "Gracchus" published a letter in *Young America* to Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, a keen supporter of Andrew Jackson. In it, he urged the senator to help "finish the glorious work of Labor's Emancipation."[127] "Why should Capital have *power* over Labor at all?" wrote Gracchus. "Should it not be Labor's instrument rather than its master? Have we not some fundamental mistake in our system that makes Labor, the creator of Capital, dependent upon its offspring, and more and more dependent the more it creates?" To correct this it was necessary "to secure to Labor the free use of the Soil; [to declare] that this use of the soil is an INALIENABLE RIGHT, and that all our practice contrary to this right has been in violation of the just principles of government."[128] Thanks to Andrew Jackson, the Second Bank of the United States might be dead but the power of capital over labor was not. A just government should support its citizens' natural right to till the soil. The NRA's pamphlet "Vote yourself a farm!" ends with an appeal to free the country from an "aristocracy of avarice" so that working men can thrive.[129]

Alvan Earl Bovay, a leader of the NRA, warned that urgent reforms were necessary or America would repeat Roman socio-economic decline. Bovay was a disciple of George Henry Evans. Before moving to Wisconsin, he had been associated with Evans and with the NRA in New York, almost from its beginning in 1844. Trained in classical languages, he spoke frequently about the rise and fall of nations.[130] Bovay was a popular speaker; his speeches were reported at length in the *Workingman's*

Advocate and *Young America*, and his letters frequently appeared in the *New-York Tribune*. Political intervention, he and other reformers insisted, was necessary in order to realize the unachieved goals of the Revolution and the vision of the Jeffersonian yeoman republic. Free homesteads, they hoped, would be the antidote to wage slavery.[131]

Bovay is said to have been the first to suggest the name "Republican Party" for the small group of men from the Whig, Democratic, and Free Soil parties at Ripon, Wisconsin, in 1854, who formed a new party that shared the NRA's concern for land reform.[132] The creation of a new political party grew out of the sectional conflicts over the expansion of slavery into the new Western territories. The stimulus for the political realignment was the passage of the Kansas–Nebraska Act of 1854, a law that repealed earlier compromises that had excluded slavery from the territories. The passage of this act brought together abolitionists and split the Democrats and the Whig party. The South wanted unlimited slavery expansion in the territories acquired through rapid westward expansion and conquest in the 1840s but the North insisted on "free soil." Slavery must not be allowed to expand into any new territories or states.

The men who met in Ripon, Wisconsin, called themselves Republicans because they believed they were the political descendants of Thomas Jefferson's party, the Democratic-Republicans. The first Republican candidate for president, former California territorial governor John C. Fremont, ran in 1856 with the slogan "Free soil, free speech, free press, Fremont." The new party was a success from the beginning. Even though Fremont ran on a third-party ticket, he captured a third of the vote. The party's motto was "free soil," and as the party grew, sympathy for the land reform measures rose even higher.[133] In Congress, "free soil" homestead bills were repeatedly proposed and, in support, the NRA movement mobilized around 250,000 people in a nationally coordinated petition drive during 1851–2.[134] In 1852, a proposal put forth by Andrew Johnson passed the House but was defeated in the Senate. It was only in the late 1850s, once the NRA had been fully absorbed into the new Republican Party and that party snowballed in strength, that the Homestead Bill was assured of success.

On February 29, 1860, Representative Galusha A. Grow of Pennsylvania gave a speech, "Free homes for free men," in the House of Representatives in favor of land reform. Grow was a committed Republican who had lobbied for nearly a decade for the Homestead Act. In his speech he quoted from Andrew Jackson's annual message to Congress in 1832 in which Jackson had recommended the speedy settlement of public lands as being in the true interest of the republic. Grow commented that "this advice by one of the country's noblest patriots, though unheeded at the time, is among the richest legacies he has bequeathed."[135] Like his Jacksonian predecessors, who had also read Roman history to their congressional cohort, Grow read out loud to the members of the House of Representatives excerpts from Plutarch and from Nathaniel Hooke's *History of Rome* about Tiberius Gracchus and Roman

agrarian reform.[136] He then argued "Had the policy advocated by Gracchus, of distributing public lands among landless citizens of the nation, been adopted, the Roman fields would have been cultivated by free men instead of slaves, and there would have been a race of men to stay the ravages of the barbarians."[137] If land reforms had been enacted and slaves not used to farm large estates, Grow argued, Rome would not have fallen.

Americans, Grow warned, were facing the same issues that Rome faced. He called on members of Congress to prevent the United States from repeating Rome's mistakes and he urged the passage of the Homestead Act. "An independent yeomanry, scattered over our vast domain, is the best and surest guaranty for the perpetuity of our liberties . . . Let the public domain, then, be set apart as the patrimony of labor, by preventing its absorption into large estates by capital, and its consequent cultivation by 'tenants and slaves,' instead of independent freeholders."[138] Speaking in praise of the Gracchi, Grow concluded that, until recently, the chroniclers of the past had been:

> sycophants of the reigning classes . . . and have branded the true defenders of the rights of the people and the champions of honorable labor as outlaws of history. . . . Because the Roman Gracchi proposed to elevate the Roman citizen, by dignifying his labor, and restoring him to the rights of which he had been unjustly deprived by the oligarchy who controlled the State, their name was made synonymous with infamy . . . Such has been the fate of the world's reformers. Is it not time to learn wisdom from the chronicles of the past?[139]

It was a powerful speech that wove together arguments that had been made by democrats such as George Bancroft, members of the NRA, the Free Soil communities in the North, and now the Republicans. Land monopoly threatened liberty. White American workers should be entitled to work the soil. Like Roman patricians, American elites were denying working men the opportunities to produce for themselves. It was vital to create a more egalitarian distribution of land or America would go the way of Rome.

But, while the workers eyed the new lands of the West as the free soil needed to create an egalitarian land worked by white yeomen (at the cost of its then residents, the Native Americans), and as they struggled to press their case against the oligopolistic owners of industrial capital in the North, in the South another vision of westward expansion was being voiced, one that envisioned the West populated by black slaves and enlightened white slave owners. As tensions between the North and South grew in the antebellum years, the South also turned to the classical world for exemplars to challenge the rhetoric of the North. Among the exemplars, an important one was found in a surprising place – in the same Gracchi brothers that Northern workers drew upon to call for the lands of the West to be worked by free white men.

Notes

1 In addition to the plays I discuss below, other plays featuring Romans include John Howard Payne's *Brutus, or the Fall of Tarquin* (1818), staged at the Bowery Theatre in 1827; David Paul Brown's *Sertorius, or the Roman Patriot* (1830); and Jonas B. Phillips's *Camillus, or the Self-Exiled Patriot* (1833). Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* was performed several times to great acclaim from 1834 to 1849 at the Bowery Theatre and, like others of Shakespeare's plays, it was performed across the nation. On the popularity of Shakespeare, see the classic essay by Levine (1993), 139–71. For the popularity of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* in America, see Maria Wyke's forthcoming book on the reception of Julius Caesar in America.

2 See McConachie (1992) and McConachie and Friedman (1985). For the emergence of cultural hierarchies, see Levine (1988), 169–242, and (1993), 139–71. The Bowery Theatre opened in 1826 and was a popular and inexpensive venue, which could seat nearly four thousand patrons. A chair in a box at the Bowery Theatre cost 75 cents, 50 cents for the third tier, and 37½ cents for the pit in 1838. McConachie (1992), 121.

3 Whitman quoted in Levine (1988), 25. Whitman relished the relaxed behavior and enthusiasm of theatre audiences. English visitor Frances Trollope had a different opinion. Describing a theater audience in Cincinnati in 1832, Mrs. Trollope wrote: "The spitting was incessant, and the mixed smell of onions and whiskey . . . and the bearing and attitudes of the men are perfectly indescribable; the heels thrown higher than the head, the entire rear of the person presented to the audience, the whole length supported on the benches . . . the noises, too, were perpetual, and of the most unpleasant kinds; the applause is expressed by cries and thumping with the feet, instead of clapping; and when a patriotic fit seized them, and *Yankee Doodle* was called for, every man seemed to think his reputation as a citizen depended on the noise he made." Trollope (1974), 133–4.

4 In addition to *Caius Marius*, Smith also wrote a play about Andrew Jackson's victory at New Orleans; it was never performed.

5 Resolution quoted in H. L. Watson (1990), 91. Italics in the original.

6 Author of Fragments of Unpublished Reminiscences of the late Edward Livingston, "Marius," *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 8/35–6 (1840): 489. According to this admirer of Marius, Sulla and Marius were respectively "mighty champions of Patrician usurpation and popular rights." The author's purpose in writing an essay on Marius is to offer "refutation of the calumnies heaped on him by Patrician writers." Marius, he wrote, was "the unbending redresser of their (proletaries) wrongs, the faithful defender of their rights against the encroachments of the nobility." (1840): 498, 479, 485.

7 Ibid., 485.

8 J. Dana (1792), 182. The speech is also found in N. Webster (1801).

9 Or so Marius portrayed himself. This rustic image may well have been a deliberate persona.

10 One anonymous author suggested that Rome would have been better off had Roman "aristocrats" imitated Marius: "Had some one of the young nobility broken through his habits of sloth and luxury, and devoted himself to the acquisition of true fame,

we would have pronounced his conduct generous and noble, worthy of applause and imitation." "An Essay," *Harvard Register* (July 1, 1827): 139.

11 "The greater praise is mine, who from the earth, / Unfoster'd, unprotected, like the oak, / Have tower'd towards the heavens, and gain'ed such strength. / The mighty in their palaces – the hot house plants / . . . look up with envy, while their sickly heads / Droop 'neath my shade." R. P. Smith (1968), I, 3, 51–8.

12 Andrew Stevenson of Virginia quoted in Miles (1974), 265.

13 In 1854, another champion of the people, Representative Mike Walsh of New York, a native of Ireland, said: "I would not barter away all the practical knowledge I have received in lumber and ship-yards for all the Latin that was ever spoken in ancient Rome. I had rather speak sense in one plain and expressive language than speak nonsense in fifty." *Congressional Globe*, 33rd Cong., 1st sess., 1854, 1231. Walsh quoted in Miles (1974), 266, note 32. However, knowledge about antiquity did not disappear with the decline of the study of classical languages: translations of Latin and Greek authors and histories of Greece and Rome were widely available, and students learned about the history of Greece and Rome in school.

14 Hofstadter (1963), 159.

15 For Forrest, see Moody (1960) and Montrose (1929).

16 In New York: "Last night the new tragedy of *Caius Marius* was produced for the benefit of Mr. Forrest. The house was crowded to overflowing. *Caius Marius* was admirably personated by our American Tragedian, and was received throughout with much applause." "Arch Street Theatre," *Ariel: A Semimonthly Literary and Miscellaneous Gazette* (January 22, 1831): 159. The play reappeared in 1858 and again starred Forrest.

17 R. P. Smith (1968), II, 3, 5.

18 Ibid., II, 2, 30.

19 Ibid., I, 3, 164–71.

20 Ibid., II, 1, 55–6.

21 Ibid., I, 3, 190–2.

22 The character of Martha is invented. Martha is a Biblical rather than a Roman name.

23 R. P. Smith (1968), IV, 4, 205–6. In fact, Marius did not die at the hands of Sulla. He died shortly after he had been selected for his seventh consulship.

24 Livy (1987), 3.44–53.

25 Parker (1992), 16.

26 Leggett quoted in Parker (1992), 16.

27 Knowles (1856), 62.

28 Ibid., 68.

29 Knowles was received with great acclaim in New York. George P. Morris, editor of the *New-York Mirror*, wrote a fulsome and florid poem in honor of Knowles that was read at the Park Theatre on April 8, 1835: "To the first dramatist of modern days; /And welcome, to the green home of the free, / With heart and hand, the bard of liberty! / His is a wizard wand. Its potent spell / Broke the deep slumber of the patriot Tell! / And placed him on his native hills again, / The pride and glory of his fellow men! / The poet speaks – for Rome Virginia bleeds! / Bold Caius Gracchus in the forum pleads!" G. P. Morris, "Address," *Workingman's Advocate* (April 18, 1835): 4.

30 Parker (1992), 15.
31 By 1854 *The Gladiator* had been performed over one thousand times. As late as 1893 it played at the Grand Opera House in New York City. Dahl (1963), 56.
32 Reviews quoted in Foust (1919), 40–4.
33 Foust (1919), 36–7.
34 In 1837, Ralph Waldo Emerson famously called on Americans to cease listening to the muses of Europe. "We [Americans] will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds." Emerson, *The American Scholar*, http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/authors/emerson/essays/amscholar.html.
35 Futrell (2001), 87.
36 Wyke (1997), 56–60; Futrell, (2001), 87. Bird wrote another play set in antiquity, *Pelopidas, or The Fall of the Polemarchs*, which won the third Forrest prize but was never produced.
37 Furstenberg (2003), 2.
38 Ibid., 8.
39 Ibid., 6.
40 Bingham (1797), 185–8. Calgacus' speech is in Tacitus, *Agricola* 29–32.
41 N. Webster (1801).
42 Bannister (1836). The events and characters in the play are fictional.
43 In the 1839 play *The Roman Captive!* it is Romans who resist slavery who are admirable. This play featured Romans enslaved in Carthage, including a Roman maiden and her father, a Roman general. Condemned to slay his own daughter, he gives the signal for rebellion: "Rise, Romans, Rise! And strike for Liberty and Vengeance!" The Romans and other slaves then break down the city walls, set fire to Carthage and free themselves. Playbill for the Bowery Theatre advertising the opening performance on October 21, 1839, located in the Harvard Theatre Collection at the Houghton Library. The author is identified as "a successful native author."
44 Bird (1966), 245.
45 "Gentlemen, The spring is fairly commenced, and summer will soon be here. We shall have the thermometer up at 96, and terrible weather that is, for hard working men! Nothing so pleasant or so healthy in such weather as a bath . . . but the working man can seldom enjoy it . . . the charge is 25 cents each time . . . When a poor man works for 50 cents a day on the road, and comes home at night hot, and dusty, and weary, 'tis somewhat too much to give the half of his day's earnings for a dip. We want, and ought to have, large public baths . . . at the public expense, as it used to be in the best days of Rome . . . 'tis a much more democratic, and, in these modern days, more fashionable way of spending the people's money, than in canvass backs and champagne . . . every time you passed the baths you helped to establish, and see some poor laborer coming out cool and refreshed you will think: "Well, after all, 'tis worth more than the venison parties and the green turtle soup!" "Public baths and canvass backs," *Workingman's Advocate* (April 2, 1831): 1.
46 Pessen (1967), 202. Most anti-monopolists wanted access to wealth rather than to challenge capitalism. Democrats applauded Jackson's breaking of the power of the Second Bank of the United States Bank (and the power of monopoly) because it opened up the possibility that more men could become entrepreneurs. According

to Wilentz, by the 1820s, two main lines of argument had developed among working men: "one tending toward defenses of capitalist entrepreneurship, the other advancing one of several radical critiques of the emerging order." And "depending on one's point of view, the labor theory could be used either to defend 'productive' capitalist entrepreneurship or to condemn it." Wilentz (1984), 145 and 158.

47 "Voice of the working men," *Workingman's Advocate* (November 12, 1831): 2.

48 According to Roediger, although the metaphoric term "wage slavery" originated in Britain in the second decade of the nineteenth century, it became widespread only in the United States: "one might regard the antebellum US labor movement as exceptional in being the world leader in militant criticisms of wage work as slavery." Roediger (1999), 66–7; see his discussion of the use of this term, 65–92. Wage slavery was later discussed at length by Karl Marx in his 1867 *Capital* (English translation first published in 1887).

49 According to Foner (1995), xvi–xviii, "many Americans experienced the expansion of capitalism not as an enhancement of the power to shape their world, but as a loss of control over their own lives . . . The metaphor that crystallized this discontent was 'wage slavery' which challenged the contrast between free and slave labor."

50 Medina composed 34 plays between her arrival in New York in the early 1830s and her death at age 25 in 1838. *The Last Days of Pompeii* was one of her most successful plays. Banks (1983), 55.

51 Banks (1983), 61; McConachie (1992), 124. There were new productions in 1836, 1840, and 1843.

52 Yablon (2007), 193.

53 Ibid.

54 Foust (1919), 48–9. "For this to make Rome howl." Bird (1966), 267.

55 McConachie (1992), 116. Forrest's popularity with the working classes was manifest during the famous Astor Place Opera House riots in New York City in 1849. The immediate catalyst was the feud between two leading actors, Edwin Forrest and the Englishman William Charles Macready, who were popular with different classes. According to Levine, "Forrest's vigorous acting style, his militant love of his country, his outspoken belief in its citizenry, and his frequent articulation of the possibilities of self-improvement and social mobility endeared him to the American people. Macready's cerebral acting style, his aristocratic demeanor, and his identification with the wealthy gentry made him appear Forrest's diametric opposite." Levine (1988), 63–9 at 63.

56 For example, Wyke (1997), 59–60.

57 Bird quoted in Dahl (1963), 59.

58 For example, in a December 26, 1846, review of the play for the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Walt Whitman, a passionate abolitionist, commented: "This play is as full of 'Abolitionism' as an egg is of meat . . . Running over with sentiments of liberty – with eloquent disclaimers of the right of the Romans to hold human beings in bondage – it is a play, this *Gladiator*, calculated to make the hearts of the masses swell responsively to all those nobler manlier aspirations in behalf of mortal freedom!" Whitman (2003), 159.

59 Furstenburg (2003), passim. E. S. Morgan (1975) explores some of these contradictions.

60 McConachie (1992), 116–17.

61 Wilentz (2005), 4.
62 The key ancient sources for the Gracchi are Plutarch's biographies of Tiberius Gracchus and Caius Gracchus and the first book of Appian's *Civil Wars*, both from the second century CE, supplemented by comments in Cicero, Sallust, and other Latin authors. Plutarch was the main ancient source on the Gracchi brothers for nineteenth-century Americans.
63 It also offered "curricula" for self-study in households, libraries, and churches. Cremin (1980), 303.
64 Cremin (1980), 490–1.
65 "Classical Library," *Workingman's Advocate* (November 5, 1831): 3.
66 This is the standard scholarly view among Roman historians on the relationship in Roman antiquity between imperialism, slavery, attempts at land reform, urbanization, and social conflict. Keith Hopkins summed up his own elegant exposition of this scenario: "Roman peasant soldiers were fighting for their own displacement." Hopkins (1978), 30. For criticism of this argument, see Jongman (2003) and Morley (1996 and 2003).
67 There is a huge amount of scholarship on the Gracchi. Some see them as aristocrats trying to increase their *clientelae* (the bodies of clients, i.e. socially dependent persons, attached to someone); others as true reformers trying to address a real problem; and still others as frustrated aristocrats using the potential in Roman political institutions to circumvent the inner circle in the Senate. Even more important, there is a serious debate about the disappearance of the small peasant holder and the growth of large estates. For modern historians' discussions of the Gracchi, see Stockton (1979); on Tiberius Gracchus, see Earl (1963); on slavery and land et al. see Morley (1996 and 2003) and Jongman (2003).
68 Plutarch (1999), 1.9, 90.
69 For the Gracchi in the post-Civil War era, see chapter 4.
70 Plutarch (1999), 1.9, 90.
71 Tiberius Gracchus was breaking precedent in seeking re-election as tribune. As Stockton (1979), 82–3, points out, precedent was a powerful and venerable concept. The Latin for revolution was *res novae* (new things). But it was also against precedent to kill an elected official who had not been found guilty of a crime.
72 He also proposed that soldiers should be supplied with clothing at public expense; that no one should be conscripted below the age of 17; and that Rome's Italian allies should be given the same voting rights as Roman citizens.
73 Plutarch (1999), 39.18, 114.
74 Nathaniel Hooke, *Roman History, from the Building of Rome to the Ruin of the Commonwealth*, 4 volumes, 5th edition, London, 1770–1, excerpts in Reinhold (1975), 182–3. For a discussion of the Tory interpretation of Roman history, see A. Ward (1964).
75 Hooke, *Roman History*, vol. 2, 533–4, quoted in A. Ward (1964), 447.
76 Reinhold (1975), 182–3.
77 Adam Ferguson, *The History of the Progress and Termination of the Roman Republic*, 6 volumes, new edition, Basel, 1791 (first published 1783), excerpts in Reinhold (1975), 179–80.
78 Ibid.

79 Adams (1788), 358–61, quoting Ferguson. Reinhold (1975) , 179–80, points out that John Adams relied on Adam Ferguson's history for his discussion on the Gracchi.
80 Cicero (1891), 202–3. "In Defense of Publius Sestius," 102.
81 Niebuhr's *History of Rome* was published at Berlin in 1811 and 1812; a revised edition appeared in 1828; and an English translation quickly followed. The first American edition (from the 1831 London edition) was published in Philadelphia in 1835.
82 Goodrich (1873), 98.
83 Niebuhr (1875), vol. 2, 276.
84 Ibid., vol. 2, 279.
85 Ibid., vol. 2, 286.
86 Ibid., vol. 2, 293.
87 Ibid., vol. 2, 306.
88 Taylor quoted in Richard (1994), 98.
89 "Monopolies," *Workingman's Advocate* (June 1, 1833): 1. As we saw in chapter 1, nineteenth-century Americans used the terms "aristocrat" or "patrician" for Roman elites and "plebeian" for commoner/non-elite, usually poor. Nineteenth-century reformers and activists saw class struggle as a constant throughout Rome's Republican history.
90 Ibid.
91 Walsh quoted in McConachie (1992), 133–4.
92 M. Walsh, "Speech of Caius Marius to the Romans," *Subterranean* (June 28, 1845): 1.
93 George Henry Evans writing for the *Man*, quoted in Wilentz (1984), 237–8.
94 For George Henry Evans and the *Workingman's Advocate* I draw on Bronstein (1999), 121–2, 134.
95 According to Cremin, there was a remarkable proliferation of newspapers from 1800 to 1860: 200 in 1801; 1,200 in 1833; 5,871 in 1870. By 1833 the United States "could boast as large a number of newspapers and as impressive an aggregate circulation as any nation in the world." English commentator Thomas Hamilton said in 1833 that newspapers in the United States penetrated "to every crevice in the Union." Cremin (1980), 191–5. Mrs. Frances Trollope, who arrived in America in late 1827, was also struck by the "universal reading of newspapers" from merchants to domestic servant men and she commented that America was a land where newspapers make part of the daily food. Trollope (1974), 82–3.
96 J. D., "To the working men of New York: For the Workingman's Advocate," *Workingman's Advocate* (September 6, 1834): 2.
97 Gracchus, "The foedal [sic] system of modern times, or the aristocracy of avarice," *Workingman's Advocate* (May 2, 1835): 1.
98 An example of this is a series of letters to the *Workingman's Advocate* signed by "Gracchus:" January 14, 1832; January 28, 1832; February 25, 1832; and two letters on May 2, 1835. Letters signed by Gracchus in the 1840s will be analyzed further on in this chapter.
99 Evans (1842), 1.
100 "Agrarianism" is criticized in an article of that title in the *New York Sentinel and Workingman's Advocate* on August 7, 1830, but the author is careful to insist that

he supports Thomas Skidmore's right to express his views. He points out that newspapers like the *Courier* and *Esquire*, the *Evening Journal*, the *Commercial Advertiser*, "and their aiders and abettors know just as well as we do, that the Agrarians are a mere handful in this city . . . but they think it politic to make believe and such a policy has invested this political folly with a fancied importance that nothing else could have obtained for it."

101 Bronstein (1999), 15–16.

102 For the history of this movement see Bronstein (1999) and Lause (2005).

103 I rely in this paragraph on Bronstein (1999), 55–85, and Foner (1995), 27–31.

104 G. Bancroft (1834) and (1857).

105 G. Bancroft (1857), 287.

106 Ibid., 280.

107 Ibid., 287.

108 Ibid., 284.

109 Ibid.

110 Editorial analyzing the struggle "between popular and Senatorial power during the last session of Congress" taken from the *New Orleans Bee* and published in the *Pittsfield Sun* (August 21, 1834).

111 "National Reform Association: regular meeting – Wednesday," *Young America* (November 29, 1845): 3.

112 "The public lands," *Young America* (July 11, 1846): 3.

113 It is worth noting that like the Roman *ager publicus*, free soil is someone else's soil (mainly Native Americans', instead of conquered Italians') made available to the conquering power's poor.

114 A passage from the Prophecies of Micah, chapter 4, concerning the future glories of Jerusalem, was a favorite: "Sword they will fashion into ploughshare and spear into pruning-hook; no room shall there be for nation to levy war against nation, and train itself at arm. At rest you shall sit, each of you with his own vine, his own fig-tree to give him shade, and none to raise the alarm." All this was to occur when God redeemed his chosen nation, the United States. Bronstein (1999), 63–5.

115 Spirit of Gracchus, "Judge of Israel – vote yourself a farm: For Young America," *Young America* (March 6, 1847): 2.

116 Duganne, "Mankind's champions," *National Era* (October 28, 1847): 2. Here is the entire poem: "How gloriously, from out the gloom of Ages, / Flash the true beacon-lights of lofty souls – / Gleaming still brighter, as Life's tempest rages – / Gilding the tide that to oblivion rolls! / Gracchus, the first martyr to the cause of reason / Still shall thy Thought each patriot's heart inflame: / Valiant Wat Tyler – if thine acts were treason / Then may such treason gild each freeman's name! / Cromwell, thou tyrant-tamer! Slaves may hate thee, / Courtiers may all thy lofty traits deny – / Courtiers and slaves did not, could not, create thee – / Thou wert of mankind's CAUSE – which shall not die! / Lo! There are Gracchi even now among us – / Tylers and Cromwell's in the People's van – / Lo! There are beacons which the Past has flung us, / flaming upon the throbbing heart of man! / We have beheld an awful Hand, inscribing / Jehovah's sentence on the walls of Wrong! / Past is the hour for mirth, and scorn, and jibing – / Heaven's balance weighs the Just against the Strong!"

117 "Ancient and modern tribune, or Horace Greeley and Tiberius Gracchus," *Littel's Living Age* (July 7, 1849): 47.
118 Bronstein points out that Greeley's "support was double-edged: he was middle-class and he was foremost a Whig politician whose private views toward the working class were less charitable than those he presented in public." Bronstein (1999), 219.
119 Greeley quoted in Foner (1995), xxv (antidote) and 27. If public lands were the "safety valve" for industrial capitalism, what happens when there are no more public lands?
120 The senior editor of the *Cincinnati Atlas* published a long editorial on the Gracchi and land reforms in Rome on May 23, 1849, which was reprinted together with a long rebuttal. "Land limitation: Some historical facts," *National Era* (June 21, 1849): 98.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
123 Ibid.
124 Roman agrarian laws were frequently misinterpreted. Machiavelli thought Roman agrarian law limited private property altogether within 500 *iugera*; early modern historians of Rome passed on this inaccuracy, and the notion that 500 was the maximum allowed for private property became a commonplace in handbooks of ancient history. Arnaldo Momigliano credited Barthold Georg Niebuhr with having sorted this out. His study proved that Romans had never used agrarian laws to undermine private ownership of land. Momigliano (1983), 8.
125 "Land limitation: Some historical facts," *National Era* (June 21, 1849): 98.
126 "National Reform Association: regular meeting – Wednesday" (November 22, 1845): 3.
127 Gracchus, "To Senator Benton," *Young America* (December 20, 1845): 3.
128 Ibid.
129 This implies, as Bronstein observes, that the work of the Revolution is ongoing. Bronstein (1999), 70–1.
130 Lause (2001), 6.
131 Foner (1995), xxv.
132 For Bovay, see Commons (1909), 484–5.
133 Bronstein (1999), 17–18.
134 Lause (2001), 6.
135 Grow (1860), 5.
136 Ibid., 6. As we have seen, Hooke was sympathetic toward the common people and critical of the Roman oligarchy. Grow read from vol. 2, book 6, ch. 7, p. 522, of Hooke's *History of Rome* and then passages from Plutarch's life of Tiberius Gracchus, including the familiar speech about the plight of the Roman poor.
137 Grow (1860), 6–7.
138 Ibid., 7.
139 Ibid.

3

Rome and the Politics of Slavery

Pennsylvania Representative Galusha A. Grow urged his colleagues to adopt the Homestead Act on the eve of the Civil War. For the North and the South, increasingly the question was whether the Western territories and new states acquired in the 1840s would be open to slavery or to "free soil" settlement. As tensions between the North and the South escalated, supporters and opponents of slavery quarried antiquity to legitimate their positions. In the North, a number of abolitionists identified with Rome's arch enemy, Carthage, and praised Carthage's fierce resistance to Roman conquest and slavery. Some opponents of slavery connected Roman decline with Roman slavery, and by analogy, warned that just as Roman slavery had led to the fall of Rome so too the health and future of the American republic were threatened by the institution of slavery.[1] Others debated whether Southern black chattel slavery was better or worse than Northern white economic "slavery." In the South, supporters of slavery separated slavery from Roman decline and argued that the accomplishments of the Greek city-states and Rome demonstrated that slavery was essential to civilized society and that slavery enabled the liberty (*libertas*) and leisure (*otium*) necessary for culture and polities, ancient and modern, to flourish.

Abolitionists

In the North, the black abolitionist David Walker utilized a Roman/Carthaginian metaphor in 1829 in his *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*. Mixing Christian and Roman references, he called white slave holders Romans, and anticipated that God would send blacks a Hannibal to overthrow the white Romans of his time.

> When I view that mighty son of Africa, HANNIBAL, one of the greatest generals of antiquity, who defeated and cut off so many thousands of the white Romans or

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> murderers, and who carried his victorious arms, to the very gate of Rome, and I give it as my candid opinion, that had Carthage been well united and had given him good support, he would have carried that cruel and barbarous city by storm. But they were dis-united, as the coloured people are now, in the United States of America, the reason our natural enemies are enabled to keep their feet on our throats. Beloved brethren – here let me tell you, and believe it, that the Lord our God, as true as he sits on his throne in heaven, and as true as our Savior died to redeem the world, will give you a Hannibal, and when the Lord shall have raised him up, and given him to you for your possession, O my suffering brethren! . . . The person whom God shall give you, give him your support and let him go his length, and behold in him the salvation of your God. God will indeed, deliver you through him from your deplorable and wretched condition under the Christians of America.[2]

Walker's references to Roman history reveal how deeply embedded the nation's imagined relationship with ancient Rome was in political discourse. Figures from the Roman past were deployed by all classes to legitimate – or contest – an oppressive present. Walker, like other reformers and radicals, found analogies to the Roman past useful for articulating his position against the evils of American slavery. He identifies with Carthage because it was an African empire ruthlessly sacked and destroyed by Rome. Hannibal, Carthage's greatest general, came close to defeating Rome. When God sends a Hannibal to lead American slaves, Walker wrote, they must unite and fight. If they do, with God's help, they will defeat the murderous neo-Romans of America, the white Southern slave owners who are oppressing noble Africans, the descendents of the Carthaginians (figure 3.1). Suffused with the apocalyptic and messianic imagery widespread during the Second Great Awakening, David Walker called upon his black brethren to rise up and resist the tyrannical white Romans of the South. Like whites, blacks now claimed a link to antiquity. They could participate in the political conversation through an imagined genealogy linking them to noble and heroic figures from African Carthage and even, as we shall see, to noble Romans.[3]

Some Southern slave mothers who escaped Southern plantation life took their children with them.[4] A few mothers, when they realized they were being pursued, resisted capture by killing themselves or killing their children. They did so because of fear of losing their children if caught. The 1850 Fugitive Slave Act contained punishments that separated a woman's children from her if the family was returned to slavery. Some black writers for the abolitionist press hailed these women as Carthaginian heroines. Caroline Winterer recounts that in 1848, Martin R. Delany, the editor of the *North Star*, a newspaper published by and for blacks, praised a "heroic mother" who "cut the throat of her child" in Covington, Kentucky, rather than return to slavery without him. He called her "A noble woman! – more deserving of fame than the . . . noble wife of Asdrubal!"[5] The black American slave mother deserved even greater praise than the aristocratic Carthaginian wife of the general Asdrubal who killed herself and her children rather than submit to Roman capture and enslavement.

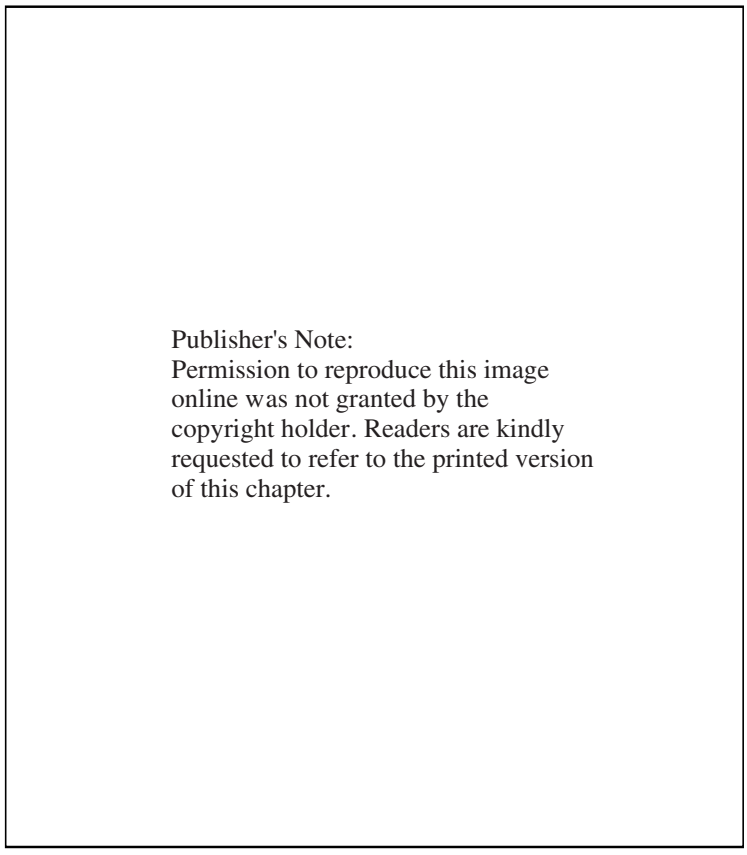
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Figure 3.1 *Portraits of Hannibal and Cyprian, with Vignettes Illustrating African Character and Wrongs*, 1836. This abolitionist poster contrasts the white slave traders' brutal treatment of Africans with the hospitality Africans extended to white visitors to Africa, and it showcases two noble ancient Africans: Hannibal and Cyprian. Courtesy of the Print, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

Female abolitionists used the Carthaginian metaphor too. In 1832, Sarah Mappes Douglass contributed three essays to William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist paper the *Liberator* under the pseudonym "Sophanisba" (sic), a Carthaginian princess who drank poison rather than be taken captive and paraded in a Roman triumph through the streets of Rome.[6] Douglass, a black woman, admired the courage of the ancient – and perhaps black – Carthaginian woman. The white abolitionist Harriet Beecher Stowe also praised the courage and determination of the women of Carthage in resisting to the end Roman conquest and slavery: "The Carthaginian women in the last peril of their state cut off their hair for bow-strings to give the defenders of their country; and such peril and shame as now hangs over this country is worse than Roman slavery, and I hope every woman who can write will

not be silent."[7] Stowe cast Carthaginian matrons rather than Roman matrons as exemplary models for American women. She hoped to inspire women to join the ranks of the abolitionists battling slavery in the American South.[8]

In perhaps the most famous of all nineteenth-century fugitive slave cases, the case of Margaret Garner, Roman allusions were invoked by abolitionists to help make sense of her actions. In 1856, Margaret Garner, her husband Robert, and their four children escaped slavery in Kentucky and crossed the frozen Ohio River to Cincinnati. A posse tracked them down to their hiding place. As the men broke down the door, Garner, preferring death to slavery for her children, killed her daughter and tried to kill her other children. She and her husband were jailed and sent back to Kentucky into slavery. On her way back south, she tried to kill herself and one of her children by jumping from a steamboat into the Ohio River. She was rescued but her daughter drowned. This is the story that inspired Toni Morrison to imaginatively re-create Garner's life in her 1987 novel *Beloved*. At the time, as Caroline Winterer has pointed out, James Bell's poem "Liberty or Death" understood Garner's actions as noble and Roman:

> Why did she with a mother's hand,
> Deprive her child of breath!
> She'll tell you, with a Roman's smile,
> That slavery's worse than death.[9]

Winterer also tells us that the Baltimore black poet and reformer Frances Ellen Watkins Harper called Garner a "heroic mother" and praised her Cato-like choice of death over slavery in her poem "The Slave Mother: A Tale of the Ohio:"

> Then, said the mournful mother,
> If Ohio cannot save,
> I will do a deed for freedom,
> She shall find each child a grave.

Pro-slavery activists, not surprisingly, dismissed such classical and positive interpretations of Garner's actions. "The Abolitionists regard the parents of the murdered child as a hero and heroine, teeming with lofty and holy emotions," fumed the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, "who, Virginius like, would rather imbue their hands in the blood of their white offspring than allow them to wear the shackles of slavery."[10] Virginius, as we have seen in chapter 2, killed his daughter, Virginia, rather than allow her to be enslaved and the victim of a tyrannical patrician's lust. Supporters of slavery rejected with contempt the comparisons of black fugitive slaves and murderers to noble Romans of the Republic.

Black and white abolitionists repeatedly pledged hostility to slavery in the same spirit as Hannibal reputedly had sworn enmity to Rome.[11] Attendees at a rally of the Western New-York Anti-Slavery Society held in Rochester in February, 1845,

for example, pledged that "As Hannibal swore on the altar of his country eternal enmity to Rome, so let us swear on the altar of truth, liberty and equal rights, eternal enmity to Slavery."[12] One reader of the abolitionist newspaper the *Liberator* compared himself to Hannibal in his hatred of slavery: "and like a young Hannibal, I swore then and there eternal hostility to American slavery."[13] John Quincy Adams believed the spirit of the oath Hannibal swore of "eternal inextinguishable hatred" for Rome should inspire opponents of slavery:

> The spirit which animated Hamilcar [Carthaginian general and father of Hannibal] in administration of the oath to his son was identically the same as that which actuated Cato in closing every speech he made in the Senate of Rome with the memorable words, *Delenda est Carthago* ["Carthage must be destroyed"]; and we have recently had the utterance of the same sentence from the Moloch of Slavery, applied to the angel of light, Abolition.[14]

Adams is referring to the pro-slavery slogan *Delenda est Abolition* ("Abolition must be destroyed"), which suggests that Cato the Elder would have been as adamant about the evils of abolition as he was certain of the necessity to destroy Carthage. Northern supporters of abolition cast themselves as noble Carthaginians resisting Roman conquest and slavery.

In addition to identifying with Carthage and its heroes and heroines, abolitionists also frequently linked Roman decline to Roman slavery. The white abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison demanded to know what should save Americans from the fate of the Romans, a fate brought on, he believed, by their slavery, intemperance, and licentiousness.[15] A contributor to the *Colored American* agreed that Rome became decadent and debased because of slavery. Commenting on the influx of slaves in the wake of Rome's conquests, he wrote

> With such an influx of slaves is it at all surprising that Rome should become debased, treacherous, sensual, and unmindful of human rights? Is it at all strange that her glory was lost in the degradation of millions? If, in the eastern hemisphere, slavery has overthrown the most flourishing and power [sic] Republics, have we not reason to fear that it may undermine the pillars that support ours?[16]

Similarly, in 1847, Henry Ruffner, Presbyterian minister and president of Washington College in Virginia, published an anti-slavery pamphlet that argued that slavery had caused the degeneration and eventual fall of Rome. George Bancroft, in his 1834 essay on the effects of slavery on Rome (later reprinted in a collection of his writings in 1857 and excerpted in magazines and newspapers), argued that slavery sapped all Roman citizens' civic virtue and corrupted public morals. Extreme differences in wealth and property and the pernicious effects of slavery, he concluded, eventually resulted in the collapse of Rome.[17]

White Slavery

In an exchange of letters with the abolitionist Gerrit Smith in 1844, labor reformer George Henry Evans wrote, "I was formerly, like yourself, sir, a very warm advocate of the abolition of slavery. This was before I saw that there was *white* slavery."[18] Evans is referring to the unhappiness of Northern working men with the oppressive effects of market capitalism. There was a lack of control over hours of work, salary, and length of employment. As we have seen, the metaphor of slavery crystallized their discontent, and "wage slavery" became a rallying slogan for white working men who found themselves subordinated to capitalist employers and ruthless landlords. Pointing to the miseries of Northern city life, Evans gives Smith the example of "a poor seamstress" who is compelled "to make three pair of light pantaloons a day for twenty-four cents and this in a city where the rent is a dollar a week!" Evans himself had known abject poverty and writes from his own experience: "You have not known what it was to want bread for your family after having been drained of your last cent by the landlord: I have . . . I am decidedly of the opinion, sir, that there is more real suffering among the landless whites of the north, than among the blacks of the south."[19]

In a similar vein, George Bancroft argued that "Philanthropy, when it contemplates a slaveholding country, may have its first sympathies excited for the slaves . . . but the needy freeman is in a worse condition. The slave has his task, and also his home and his bread . . . The indigent freeman has neither labor, nor house, nor food."[20] In Bancroft's view the white free man without land is to be pitied more than the slave. "Would you abolish slavery?" he asked. "Imitate Gracchus, and pass a law in spirit like his; that none but the free shall till the soil. Let the plough, the spade, and the hoe be safe from the touch of bondmen, and bondage will cease."[21] The aim here is to prevent land from being tilled by chattel slaves so that white men can till it.

For Evans, Bancroft, and other reformers, the issue of *white* slavery was more important than the abolition of black chattel slavery. The plight of white workers in the North, they argued, was worse than that of chattel slaves in the South, who were at least guaranteed a roof over their heads and food provided for by their masters in exchange for their labor.[22] Opening up lands in the West for homesteading for the white wage slaves of industrial capitalism took priority over the abolition of chattel slavery.

Newspaper coverage of the opposition of the Southern planter wing of the Democratic Party to the Freedom of the Public Lands Bill drew explicit comparisons between greedy Roman landowners, opposed to the reforms of the Gracchi brothers, and Southern plantation owners. In 1858, Senator Henry Wilson pointed to the exhaustion of Southern soil. "Millions of acres of the richest soil of the western world have been converted into barrenness and desolation, by the

untutored, unpaid, and thriftless labor of slaves. This . . . reminds us of the desolating effects of Slavery upon the rich fields of classic Italy, in the days of Tiberius Gracchus."[23] The first page of the *National Era* on February 7, 1850, contained a summary and a comment on the debate on land reform that had taken place in the Senate the preceding week. Pointing a finger at Southern senators the commenter accused large slaveholders in the South of acting like avaricious Roman landowners opposed to the reforms of the Gracchi.[24] Opening the West to chattel slavery was problematic primarily because of the deleterious effect it would have on the land and on the aspirations of white men who would like to farm land recently added to the nation.

In the 1830s and 1840s, abolitionism had been a vocal but minority position. The immediate abolition of all slavery was an unpopular view even among Northerners who opposed slavery. Many racist Northerners did not want freed slaves assimilating into American society. Jobs were scarce and tenuous enough as it was and many Northern workers did not relish the prospect of the additional competition of blacks. By the 1850s, however, abolitionism seemed less threatening than the spread of slavery to the American West. Republicans, according to Eric Foner, "identified slavery and the threat of its expansion, not the inner logic of capitalism, as the force that threatened Northern workers' right to the fruits of their toil."[25] Abolitionism found room under the big tent of the recently formed Republican Party alongside the National Reform Association's drive for opening the public domain.

The Southern Defense of Slavery

Northern criticisms of ancient and modern slavery outraged pro-slavery Southerners. Supporters of chattel slavery separated slavery from Roman decline and argued that slavery was common in antiquity, it was grounded in natural law and the Bible, and it enabled the liberty and leisure necessary for ancient and modern republics to flourish. In 1855, George Frederick Holmes, professor at the college of William and Mary, wrote an extensive rebuttal aimed at George Bancroft and other critics of slavery, buttressed with citations from classical authors to counter Northern diatribes on the social, political, and economic dangers of slavery – ancient or American. It was not slavery that led to the decline of Greece or Rome, Holmes argued; rather it was "the avarice of the wealthy and their oppression of the poor . . . the increase of wealth, luxury, and rapacity and the corroding influences of universal greed."[26] Citing as correct Pliny's remark *latifundia perdidere Italiam* ("great estates ruined Italy"), Holmes argued that this should be "attributed to [Roman] greed, luxury, fraud, peculation, plunder, extortion, and oppression, but not to slavery."[27] In fact, Holmes argued, free labor in Italy was destroyed by "licentious greed, the peculating and hungry indolence of the Romans."[28] Holmes and other pro-slavery authors were able to separate land monopoly from

slavery – they did not make a connection that it was due to slave labor that the rich got richer. Moving back and forth from the classical past to the present, Holmes insisted that it was not slavery that produces rapacity – for the same tendencies, he pointed out, are manifested by the capitalists in the Northern states of America and abroad. Was it slavery, he asked, that had made England and parts of the United States a "manufacturing hell"?[29] "Substitute the word machinery for slavery, and it is applicable to the most advanced civilization of the present century."[30] For Holmes, the culprits in Rome were the corrupt and avaricious Roman landowners and in the modern world greedy capitalists. Slavery, emphatically, was not the cause of the demise of free labor.

As for the Gracchi, Holmes pointed out that they were not interested in abolishing or abating slavery. They expended their energies on trying to restore public land to what he, like George Bancroft, terms the Roman "yeomanry." Holmes believed this was a good thing – the failure of the Romans to support the citizen-farmer class, the class that provided soldiers for the Roman armies, resulted in a decline of a loyal and patriotic base for Rome's military – and Holmes and others recognized the value of a strong yeoman class to their own slave society. To their minds, the Gracchi were reformers not social revolutionaries. It was "ridiculous" to claim that they wanted to eliminate Roman slavery. Southern planter elites could thus admire the Gracchi for their honor, their oratorical skills, and their calls for reform even as they rejected Northern attempts to implement agrarian reforms similar to those the Gracchi proposed.

Pro-slavery writers were well aware that Greece and Rome relied on slave labor. As early as 1790, Southerners pointed out that Greece and Rome were slave-holding societies: "There never was a Government on the face of the earth, but what permitted slavery. The purest sons of freedom in the Grecian Republics, the citizens of Athens and Lacedaemon, all held slaves."[31] South Carolina lawyer and writer David McCord insisted that "All the greatest and freest people of antiquity were slaveholders."[32] "The free states of antiquity abounded with slaves," wrote South Carolinian statesman John C. Calhoun, who argued that "there has never yet existed a wealthy and civilized society in which one portion of the community did not, in point of fact, live on the labor of the other."[33] Virginia planter and lawyer George Fitzhugh pointed out, correctly, that "Liberty and equality are the new things under the sun."[34] Slavery, he and others argued, was a basic building block of civilized life.

Pro-slavery writers stressed the virtues of an ordered, hierarchical society and praised aristocratic values. Hierarchy was built into the very structure of the cosmos, and slavery was part of the natural order. Dominance and subordination were intrinsic to social relations, argued George Fitzhugh, and it is human nature to be in "a constant conflict, war, or race of competition."[35] Men are unequal and "bestowing upon men equality of rights, is but giving license to the strong to oppress the weak."[36] This fundamental inequality is best handled, Fitzhugh believed, by an acceptance of dependence and inequality. "A state of dependence

is the only condition in which reciprocal affection can exist among human beings – the only situation in which the war of competition ceases, and peace, amity and good will arise," which Michael O'Brien has translated as: "For Fitzhugh, slavery was about being safe and protected, about people being unequal but nice to each other."[37] Slavery was the basis of an enlightened and paternalistic form of social organization.

It need hardly be said that this was a patriarchal hierarchy. Plantation mistress Louisa S. McCord believed God had arranged the world in a hierarchical fashion: the positions of slaves, women, and children were

> In truth . . . essentially states of bondage as any other, the differences being in degree, not in kind. They are states of subjection to the supremacy of others, and of greater or less deprivation of the rights of self government. This, the true definition of slavery, applies equally to the position of women in the most civilized and enlightened countries.[38]

"Equality," she asserted, "is no thought or creation of God. Slavery, under one name or another, will exist as long as man exists."[39] Like Fitzhugh, she believed that slavery was a kindness to an inferior race that would otherwise be destroyed in the competitive state of war that is characteristic of the human species. When viewed through this lens, slavery can be seen as benevolent. Slavery is good for the negro who is "protected" from annihilation.

George Fitzhugh was convinced that the "experiment" in the Northern states with liberty and equality had failed: "if we are to form our opinions from the discontent of the masses . . . liberty and equality have not conduced to enhance the comfort of happiness. Crime and pauperism have increased. Riots, trade unions, strikes for higher wages, discontent breaking out into revolution, are things of daily occurrence."[40] Fitzhugh saw clearly the consequences of Northern industrial capitalism for the working man. He attacked industrialists and accused *them* of being slave owners. "You, with the command over labor which your capital gives you, are a slave owner – a master, without the obligations of a master. They who work for you, who create your income, are slaves, without the rights of slaves. Slaves without a master!"[41] By contrast, Southern plantations are paradisiacal islands of communism. "A southern farm is the beau ideal of Communism – we provide for each slave, in old age and in infancy, in sickness and in health, not according to his labor, but according to his wants."[42] Southerners were thus able to employ the concept of wage slavery as a critique of free labor in the North. Wage slavery lacks the obligations and rights that (theoretically) underpin the master–slave system.

Aristotle's *Politics* was a gift to pro-slavery authors. W. J. Grayson, a contemporary of John C. Calhoun, looked to Aristotle for support and wrote "a democratic government cannot exist unless the laboring classes be slaves . . . It is not a new thing, but it is two thousand years old . . . it is as ancient as Aristotle." "Aristotle's *Politics*," he believed, "should be [a] textbook in all Southern colleges," for his words on slavery are "as clear and emphatic as language can furnish."[43]

John C. Calhoun had been a close student of Aristotle's *Politics* and "he used to say that literature and philosophy had sustained no greater loss than the latter part of that book."[44] Intellectual and statesman Hugh Legaré, summarizing Aristotle, wrote: "The relation of master and slave is just as indispensable in every well ordered state, as that of husband and wife, or the other domestic relations."[45] Holmes, quoting Aristotle's *Politics*, wrote that "Nature has clearly designed some men for freedom and others for slavery – and with respect to the latter slavery is both just and beneficial."[46] Aristotle's views on slavery were adapted to legitimate the Southern master class's reliance on slavery.

Southerners argued that political order and culture depended on a leisured class. Those enamored of Athenian culture and Roman institutions made the argument that slaves provided the leisure necessary for their achievements. George Frederick Holmes wrote that "A slave society had produced Pindar, Thucydides, Plato, Aristotle, and Roman slaveholders had conquered the world, legislated for all succeeding ages, and laid the broad foundations of modern civilization and modern institutions."[47] Thomas R. Dew argued that slavery made freedom possible for Greek and Roman citizens.

> If we look to the Republics of Greece and Rome, in the days of their glory and civilization, we shall find no one doubting the right to make slaves of those taken in war . . . Aristotle, the greatest philosopher of antiquity, and a man of as capacious mind as the world ever produced, was a warm advocate of slavery – maintaining that it was reasonable, necessary and natural, and accordingly in his model of a republic, there were to be comparatively few freemen served by many slaves.[48]

Slavery was the sine qua non of the great achievements of antiquity, insisted George Fitzhugh: "this high civilization and domestic slavery did not merely co-exist, they were cause and effect . . . Greece and Rome were indebted to this institution alone for the taste, the leisure and the means to cultivate their head and their hearts . . . [without it] they never would have produced a poet, an orator, a sculptor or an architect."[49] Southern elites could flatter themselves that slavery allowed the flourishing of their own patrons and producers of culture. "Domestic slavery has produced the same results in elevating the character of the master that it did in Greece and Rome," wrote Fitzhugh. "He is lofty and independent in his sentiments, generous, affectionate, brave and eloquent . . . History proves this . . . Scipio and Aristides, Calhoun and Washington, are the noble results of domestic slavery."[50] Just as slavery bolstered the characters of the master class of antiquity, so it enables the virtues of antiquity's descendants in the American South to blossom.

Greece and Rome flourished because slavery freed citizens from the necessity of labor and gave them *otium* – the leisure necessary for participating in politics and the cultivation of the arts. Similarly, slavery provided *otium* for the Southern master class. The connection between slavery, *otium*, and liberty had deep roots in Southern culture. A 1776 design for the seal of the state of Virginia included a motto chosen for the outer rim placed in an arc around personifications of *Libertas*

(Liberty), *Ceres* (Prosperity), and *Aeternitas* (Eternity): *Deus nobis haec otia fecit* ("God has granted us this leisure").[51] *Otium*, as David Fischer has pointed out, is here both leisure *and* independence. It is freedom from having to till the soil (which slaves will do) and a freedom from dependence on another's will.[52] "I am an aristocrat," said Senator John Randolph of Roanoke, Virginia, "I love liberty, I hate equality."[53] Liberty depended upon hierarchy and inequality.

In sharp contrast to the value Northern Anglo-Saxon Protestants placed on labor and industriousness, elite Southern whites aspired to be free from labor. In the North, the legacy of the Puritans meant that labor was virtuous and idleness was viewed as disreputable and bordering on sinfulness. In the South, labor was viewed with contempt. As in ancient Greece, the work that slaves performed was unfit for citizens. "In Sparta, the freemen were forbidden to perform the offices of slave, lest he might lose the spirit of independence," wrote Thomas R. Dew. "In modern times, too, liberty has always been more ardently desired by slave-holding communities."[54] The spirit of liberty, Southerners could argue, burned with more intensity in the breasts of Southerners than in Northern breasts.

Like many Americans influenced by romantic nationalism, Southerners idealized ancient Greece. Even more than the North, the South glorified Greek culture and praised the autonomy of the Greek city-states. Southern supporters of the compact theory of a confederation of states found much to admire in the autonomy of the Greek city-states. Many Southerners preferred the Greek system of small independent states to the Roman form of government. Pro-slavery theorists generally loved classical Athens – "The soil of Athens is consecrated ground," wrote Holmes in 1847.[55] Southern leaders praised Athenian democracy because only free citizens, "answering in position to our white men of the South," were allowed the vote; this democracy was, in reality, a "refined nobility."[56] This vision was preferable to the views on democracy popular in the North.

At the same time that the Greeks were elevated as a model both for politics and culture, there remained an abiding deep love and respect among conservative planter elites for the heroes of the Roman Republic, for Plutarch's noble Romans, who were such an inspiration to the Revolutionary generation. Plutarch was still indispensable. Southerner William Henry Holcombe noted in 1855: "I suspect that Plutarch's *Lives* has had as much influence over the insensible development of human character and sentiment as any other single book – the Bible alone excepted."[57] Southern orators and politicians claimed that it was they who were upholding the liberty for which their forefathers were willing to give their lives, while the North was going the way of tyrannical imperial Rome.

Louisa S. McCord's *Caius Gracchus*

In 1851, Southern matron Louisa S. McCord wrote a tragedy based on the life of Caius Gracchus, which she dedicated to her only son, Cheves. The play focused

on the last days in the life of Caius Gracchus, the only surviving son left to Cornelia, the most famous of Roman mothers. The Gracchi appealed to Louisa S. McCord. They were, she wrote, "among my bona fide heroes."[58]

Louisa S. McCord came from a prominent South Carolinian family. Her father was Langdon Cheves, a prosperous lawyer who had been president of the Bank of the United States, and had held a number of political offices – first as attorney general of South Carolina, and then as a member of Congress where he became speaker of the House of Representatives. Like many Southern statesmen he was famed for his eloquence and was compared to Cicero and Demosthenes.[59] Louisa shared his love for literature and oratory. She was well educated – she knew the classics and she read French and Italian. Unlike most young Southern women, she did not enjoy her trips to the springs of Virginia, the summer resorts where the Southern well-to-do went to see and be seen.[60] She wanted from an early age to be a poet and a writer. Rather than act the belle and display her charms and fashionable wardrobe, she preferred to talk politics with men and write.

Her views on politics and society, Michael O'Brien tells us, wouldn't have ruffled many Southern feathers. She was pro-slavery, believed in the superiority of the white race, supported secession, was in favor of laissez-faire capitalism, and argued for woman's separate sphere. She was confident in the superiority of "those born in the purple, the gentry."[61] She trained her son, Cheves, to live up to the ideals of her family and her class. A Southern gentleman was expected to act honorably, speak beautifully, and serve the state with disinterested patriotism and distinction. Cheves attended South Carolina College and – after the war broke out – served the Confederacy. But, O'Brien notes, McCord was an atypical woman in other ways: she published a great deal – poems, book reviews (including a scathing review of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*), and essays on social and political economy, slavery, and the role, place, and duty of women – and her prose was polemical and defiant.[62] Contemporaries coped with dissonance by describing her as "masculine" and "Roman."[63] Friends and relatives agreed that she did indeed resemble the Roman matron Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi. Tall, strong, and commanding, she had a mind "Roman in its cast, and heroic in its energy." The tutor to her children remarked, "in person Mrs. M might personate Cornelia herself."[64]

Admiration for Cornelia was widespread in antebellum America but was especially strong in the South where she exemplified a Southern ideal of motherhood. "That most glorious woman, Cornelia – the mother, whose great heart knew no other thought than that of Rome," was widely praised in speeches, poetry, and literature.[65] When widowed, Cornelia refused a marriage offer from King Ptolemy of Egypt, preferring to remain in Rome and raise her children. She took pride in her sons, and trained them to be good citizens, spurring them on to live up to the glory of their name through serving Rome and earning fame. She shunned superficial signs of status – when asked why she wore no jewels, she famously pointed to her sons and replied: "These are *my* jewels" (*Haec ornamenta mea sunt*) (figure 3.2). Cornelia survived the killing of her two sons and the ruin of their political causes

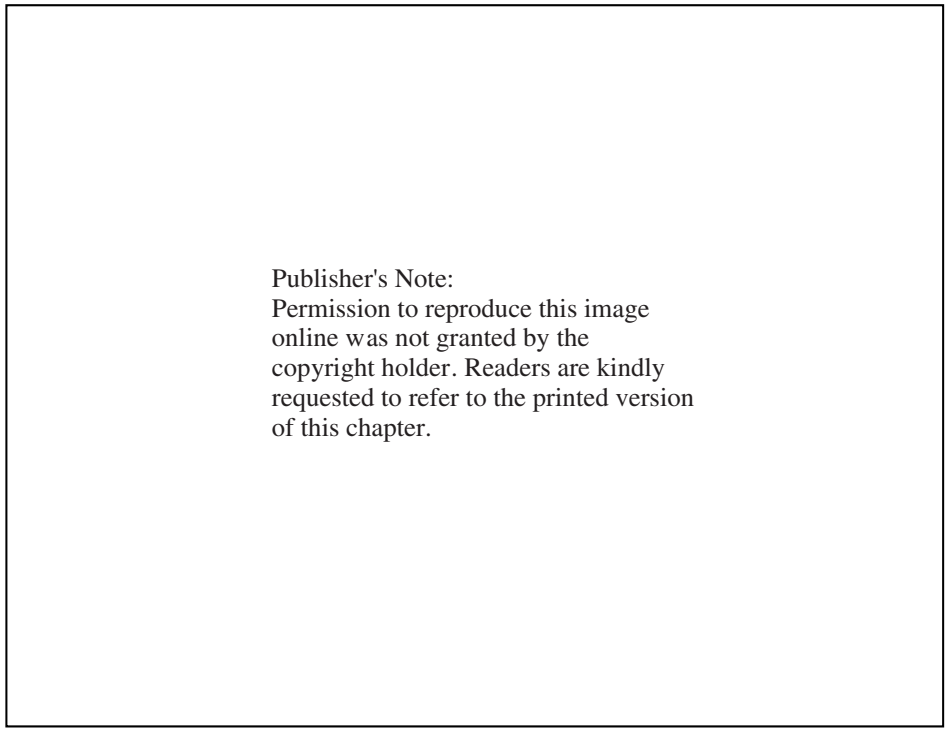
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Figure 3.2 Joseph-Benoit Suvee, *Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi*, 1795. Oil on canvas. Louvre, Paris, France. Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY.

undaunted. She wrote beautifully – the great orator Cicero praised her letters.[66] After the loss of her sons, Cornelia retired to Misenum on the Bay of Naples, where she wrote letters and socialized with a circle of learned Greeks.

In her play *Caius Gracchus*, McCord presents her hero as a Roman patriot who exemplifies the best qualities of the old Roman ruling elite. He acts like a man shaped by Cicero's *De Officiis*, a text written for the Roman political elite that discusses the ideal relationship between virtue and duty, and a text widely read by educated Americans from the Revolutionary era on. Cicero's work was aimed at the Roman governing class and he connected high ideals and practical action through the concept of duty. In the antebellum South, the classics continued to play an important role in the education of the planter class. It is likely that McCord knew Charles P. Pelham, professor of Roman literature at South Carolina College from 1846 to 1857. The McCords' town home in Columbia was close to South Carolina College, where Louisa's husband, David McCord, was on the board of trustees. Pelham regularly taught Cicero's *De Officiis* to the sons of the planter elites who attended the college. As Wayne Durrill has shrewdly observed in his study of the curriculum at South Carolina College, Cicero could have been interpreted by Southern elites as justifying and ennobling their exercise of power

over poor whites and slaves so long as they put into practice Cicero's lofty ideas on virtue.[67]

Francis Lieber, Prussian professor of history and political economy at South Carolina College from 1836 and a friend of David McCord's, frankly believed the classics should be used to train Southern elites for their role in managing the state. "History," proclaimed Lieber in his inaugural address, "is of peculiar importance in the course of instruction pursued with sons of republicans, who, at some future period, have themselves to guide the state, when no external force, no power above them, no consideration of interest foreign to the well being of their own body politic shall prescribe to them the course they have to steer." When that situation arose, it was useful to "travel back into former periods, and compare them to the present times."[68] Lieber had been a literary assistant to Roman historian Barthold Georg Niebuhr in Rome, who, as noted earlier, had praised the Gracchi in his history as essentially heroic and tragic figures who unsuccessfully attempted to force members of the ruling class to address the desperate plight of the Roman free men. McCord had read Niebuhr, she knew Lieber, and she had read Cicero herself and heard her father discuss him as one of his favorite authors. Cicero's views on the relationship between virtue, duty, and good governance and contemporary descriptions of the Roman tribunes as upholders of the honor and duty of their class shaped her representation of Caius Gracchus. They may well also have shaped the political attitudes and aspirations of a number of educated Southern gentlemen.

Caius Gracchus' cause in McCord's play was a conservative one. Reform rather than revolution was his aim. With passionate oratory, he strove to recall Roman free men and the ruling Roman elites to their once honorable roles in Roman society. The performance of virtue, civic duty, and an austere patriotism had characterized the citizens of the early Roman Republic. But the Senate had become corrupt, greedy, and cynical – manipulating the populace to further its own gains. After systematic exploitation, the once proud and landowning free men have become craven and dissolute. Gracchus eloquently reminded Roman free men of their rights and their contributions to Rome's history and stature and he urged them to resist oppression. "Ye are Rome's masters – her true governors / At once, and truest servants."[69] Roman free men should resist oppression but respect the Roman social order.

> Romans, the fathers of this Senate
> were Rome's noblest citizens; the country's prop,
> And every way her boast. They won them rights,
> From which, with all their vices, still their sons
> Ought not to be cast down. Leave them the dues
> Their Fathers' virtues won. Revere in them
> The noble legacy of by-gone deeds;
> But rouse ye 'neath oppression![70]

Because the Roman elites are exploitative, and are not fulfilling their obligation in the hierarchy of society, citizens have the right and the obligation to resist oppression. Speaking to the Roman free men he commands: "Speak out: Freemen, or Slaves?"[71] Caius, like his brother Tiberius, will sacrifice his life "In the great cause for which my brother bled: / the cause of Rome, of liberty, and man!"[72] Slaves are not expected to revolt but Roman citizens who do not resist tyranny deserve to be slaves.[73]

Turning to the Senate, McCord's Caius Gracchus reminds them of their noble history and their responsibilities to govern honorably and with justice.

> One word to you, ye noble Senators;
> Though you misdoubt me, as a friend I speak,
> Of Rome and of no party. Conscript fathers,
> I plead to you, with filial duty bending,
> As son to a harsh parent. Let us end
> This so unnatural struggle. Be but just,
> We ask no more. This quarrel once removed,
> Our rights acknowledged, and our privileges
> Laid open fairly, to the strengthening 'tis
> At once of you and us.[74]

The speech is a plea for change *and* an assurance that insurrection is not his motive. McCord's Caius Gracchus is careful to acknowledge and respect the social order and political hierarchy.

Louisa S. McCord's Caius Gracchus sounds a lot like South Carolina Senator John C. Calhoun. In an 1848 speech against the Wilmot Proviso (which would have barred slavery from land acquired in the Mexican War) Calhoun urged resistance to the Yankee *imperium*:

> I turn now to my friends of the South and ask, what are you prepared to do? . . . are you prepared to sink down into a state of acknowledged inferiority; to be stripped of your dignity of equals among equals, and be deprived of your equality of rights in this federal partnership of States? . . . If so, you are wo[e]fully degenerated from your sires, and will well deserve to change condition with your slaves . . . The South must rise up and bravely defend herself, or sink down into base and acknowledged inferiority.[75]

Here, Calhoun connects resistance to Northern aggression with liberty and equates supine compliance to slavery. Southerners must prove themselves worthy of liberty. If they do not resist oppression, they deserve slavery.

Senator Calhoun wore the mantle of the American Founding Fathers when he urged his contemporaries in the Senate to remember the spirit of 1776. He was called by some of his admirers the *Ultimus Romanus* ("last Roman"), and the citizens of South Carolina commissioned Hiram Powers to sculpt him as a

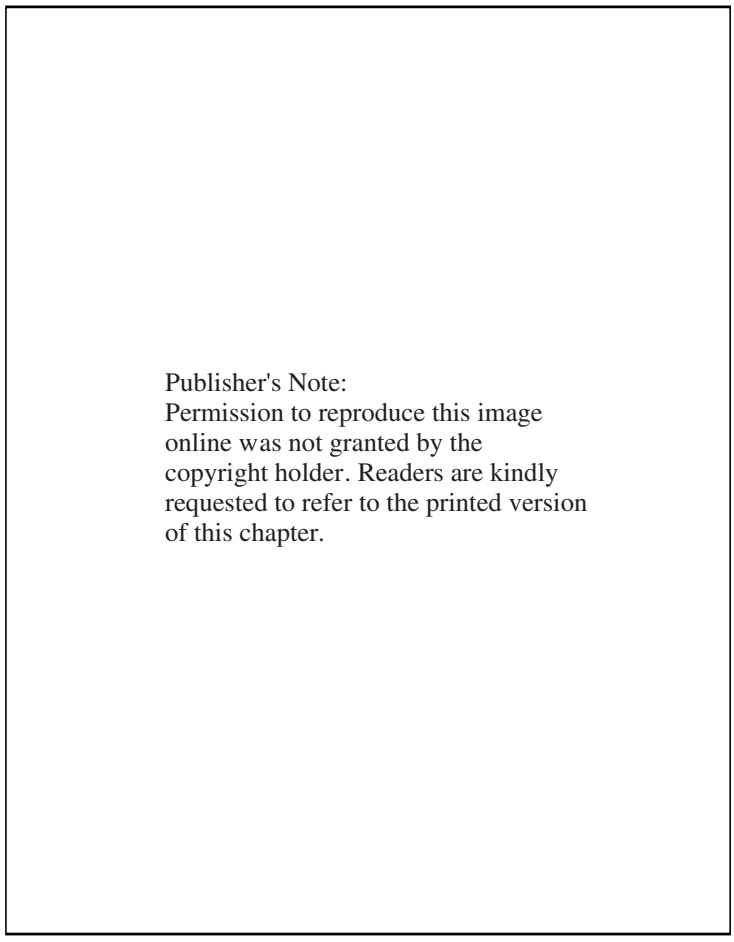
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Figure 3.3 Unknown, *John C. Calhoun*, c.1850. Parian ware scaled-down copy of original statue by Hiram Powers. The original statue was destroyed during the Civil War. In Hiram Powers's words, "I have represented him in Senatorial costume (*himation* of a Roman orator) and, as it were, speaking. A case of scrolls rests at his feet. He has a scroll in his left hand . . . on which is inscribed in his own hand the words 'Truth, Justice and the Constitution,' a motto furnished by himself." Courtesy of the Gibbes Museum of Art/Carolina Art Association.

Roman senator (figure 3.3).[76] The statue was displayed in Charleston City Hall. Those who agreed with Calhoun's views on states rights, the federal tariffs and the Nullification Crisis, and secession called him Scipio Africanus South Caroliniensis after the Roman general famous for his successful battles against Hannibal and Carthage, the imperial enemy of Republican Rome.[77] Others viewed him as a nineteenth-century Cato of Utica resisting Northern *imperium*.[78] His enemies called him John "Catiline" Calhoun after the leader of a conspiracy that sought

the overthrow of the Roman Republic.[79] Calhoun's views were seen by his opponents in the North as a betrayal of the Union.

Liberty and upholding the values and ideals of the early American republic were, of course, what South Carolinians and other Southerners claimed they were fighting for in their struggles against an increasingly aggressive North. Federal tariffs, opposition to slavery in newly conquered territories, and abolitionist diatribes on the moral evils of slavery were deemed oppressive. In the Southern War for Independence, separation from the Union embodied the spirit of the American Revolution. Looking back at the Civil War, classicist Basil Gildersleeve insisted that "the cause we fought for and our brothers died for was the cause of civil liberty, and not the cause of human slavery, is a thesis which we feel ourselves bound to maintain whenever our motives are challenged or misunderstood."[80] Gildersleeve was not alone in framing the war in terms of a fight for independence and liberty. Southerners argued they had the right to pull out of a Union that was oppressing some of its members. Separation from a tyrannical power was not only permissible, it was necessary and virtuous – it was rooted in the ideology of the American Revolution. "To us," said Gildersleeve, "submission meant slavery, as it did to Pericles and the Athenians"[81] In the North, workers linked access to public lands and the ability to produce for themselves as a fundamental right and guarantor of liberty; in the South liberty was linked to hierarchy and inequality.

When McCord's Caius Gracchus demanded of the Roman free men: "Speak out: Freemen, or Slaves?" South Carolinians could hear echoes of Addison's *Cato*, first performed in South Carolina in 1735, long before Washington at Valley Forge.[82] They knew Cato had chosen death for the sake of liberty, as had a number of other ancient and modern republican heroes. The tradition of casting those who must be resisted as Roman oligarchs or Caesars had deep roots in the South. Now, the Yankee North had become Caesar. Framing resistance to Roman/Yankee tyranny as the choice between freedom and (white) slavery would have resonated with Southern planter elites *and* Southern whites who would never own slaves. This worked to keep all Southerners committed to supporting a system of chattel slavery – even those it did not directly benefit. One reviewer noted with approval that McCord's play "abounds with striking passages full of high and noble thoughts, clothed in a language well fitted to give them just expression . . . [Gracchus,] with due poetic license, as the hero of the play, is portrayed in fairest hues as the ideal patriot and citizen."[83] Resistance to oppression is the main theme of McCord's *Caius Gracchus*, and its Roman hero embodies American republican patriotism: the willingness to fight to the death for liberty.

Caius Gracchus is a tragic hero. McCord casts him as a Roman Hector, Homer's prince of Troy, beloved husband of Andromache, who dies fighting Achilles because he knows he could not endure the shame of not defending Troy.[84] In a moving passage in the *Iliad*, Andromache begs Hector not to go to certain death and leave her a widow and their son without a father. Licinia, Caius' wife, does

the same: "What's Rome to you that you should die for her, / And leave your wife and boy?" Like Hector, he replies:

> Should I a traitor – Recreant – turn cowardly, to shun my friends,
> Would you, love, longer own my tarnished name,
> Or rather weep for Gracchus as one dead,
> With horror shrinking from the counterfeit,
> Whose shame could blight his honor! E'en yourself,
> With all your gentle cowardice, would shun
> And blush to name the father of our boy.[85]

Unlike Homer's Hector, McCord's Caius Gracchus has a powerful mother who intervenes to give her son support for his doomed, if noble, cause. When Licinia turns to Cornelia and asks her to intervene, Cornelia will refuse not once, but twice. "Twixt life and honor – I would bid him die." But, says Licinia, "Do you not love your son? Does your heart beat? / He is your all on earth!" Cornelia, replies:

> Hear me, ye Gods!
> My supplications are to you for this
> My last, best hope in my life; my *only one*!
> I pray ye now to give him strength to bear
> This heavy trial; parting, worse than death,
> From the heart-stricken loved ones! Go, my son.
> I have no word to stop you. If your life
> Without dishonor can be saved, remember
> You owe it to your wife, and to your boy.[86]

Cornelia leaves her house, the woman's sphere, only once in the play. When Caius takes refuge in a temple and considers suicide, she goes to him and tells him he must not despair.

> For life and duty strive; nor be the coward
> Who, shrinking, dreads on his own heart to look
> And dies, to shun responsibility.[87]

Caius, wanting to be worthy of such a mother, replies,

> Mother, I go.
> May heaven so bless you, as your son shall strive
> To prove the honor and the love he bears you
> By working out the noble thoughts you teach.[88]

Cornelia reminds her son of his duty. The outcome does not matter. It is the performance of duty that is of utmost importance. In a similar spirit, John C. Calhoun

wrote to his daughter, Anna Maria, that she should not think he expected success in his struggles against corruption in the federal government. "Far higher motives impel me; a sense of duty – to do our best for our country, and leave the rest to Providence. I hold the duties of life to be greater than life itself."[89] Cornelia's intervention gives her son the strength to fulfill his duty and meet death fighting for liberty from (Yankee) oppression.

Cornelia was a role model for Louisa S. McCord, who had no time for the "distressingly vapid" women in popular fiction. She admired strength, sacrifice, and grandeur. "If ladies will borrow arguments from imaginary characters, why not take at once the powerful Minerva springing full-armed from the brow of Jove?"[90] Roman matrons were considered exemplary women: dignified, courageous, and long-suffering. Although excluded from formal political arrangements, Roman (and American) women held positions of authority and influence in the domestic sphere as guardians of republican virtue and the communal good through the care of their families. McCord embraced woman's separate sphere:

> To be a divinity, a genial, household divinity . . . to be worshiped at that holiest altar of the Penates, the home hearth; to be the soul of that home, even as our great Father-God is the soul of creation; to be the breath, the life, the love-law of that home; the mother, the wife, the sister, the daughter – such is woman's holiest sphere, and her largest endowment.[91]

Forbidden from action in the public sphere, Cornelia (and Louisa) trained sons to virtuous service and a high sense of honor. Her Cornelia is a towering figure who, like Louisa S. McCord herself, achieved a tragic grandeur as a mother who must find the strength to support the sacrifice of her "best hope" and her "*only one*." Larger than life, Cornelia dominates the play – it is as much about her heroism and stature as it is about her son's.[92] According to one contemporary review, the subject of the play was "the idea of external repression, exciting personal feeling, and turning the mind to the contemplation of examples of heroic resistance."[93] McCord's play infused the Roman mother and son with Southern ideals of honor, service, and sacrifice for the sake of liberty.[94] Such ideals and sentiments were cherished by many across the South.

After secession and the outbreak of war, Louisa S. McCord, like other Southern ladies, spurred her own son, Cheves, to fight for an essentially conservative cause.[95] She worked tirelessly for the Confederacy. When her beloved Cheves was wounded on August 29, 1862, at the field of Second Manassas, Louisa went to rescue him. She was blocked at Richmond and informed that there were no trains running. Undaunted, she chartered a special train and brought Cheves to Columbia to nurse him at home. "Mother of the Gracchi," friends cried when they heard what she had done.[96] Cheves was not fully recovered when he insisted on returning to the battlefield, and he died not long afterward, from a head wound, on January 23, 1863, a loss that broke his mother's heart but did not suppress her efforts in

support of the war. After the failure of the War for Southern Independence she lived largely away from South Carolina, mostly in Canada, until 1877, when she returned to Charleston and lived there until her death in 1879.[97] In happier times, in 1859 while on a tour of Europe, she sat for sculptor Hiram Powers in his studio and home in Florence. Fittingly, he sculpted her as a Roman matron.

A Northern *Imperium*?

As the Civil War drew to its inexorable close, the faltering South turned to Cato's "liberty or death" for inspiration. In 1865, shortly before the fall of Richmond, Virginia, the prominent writer and journalist Edward Alfred Pollard composed a small pamphlet, "The glory of history is honour," urging the people of Richmond to continue to resist the Yankees. In his pamphlet, he compared the contemporary struggle to the battle of Cato and the Roman liberators against Caesar. Pollard was a member of the aristocratic elite of Richmond, a city located on seven hills, which led its inhabitants to call it "our Rome," and whose capitol building Thomas Jefferson had designed after a Roman temple.[98] To inspire his fellow citizens, Pollard cited passages from Plutarch that describe the fall of Utica and Cato's suicide: "For me," said Cato, "intercede not. It is for the conquered to turn suppliants, and for those who have done an injury to beg pardon. For my part, I have been unconquered through life, and superiour [sic] in the things I wished to be; for in justice and honour I am Caesar's superior."[99] Pollard makes Richmond the South's Utica and those who resist the Yankee Caesar comparable in honor to those who held out against the Roman Caesar. "My friends," Pollard wrote, "this is not rubbish. The glory of History is indifferent to events: it is simply Honour. . . . I am for Virginia going down to history, proudly and starkly, with the title of a subjugated people . . . rather than as a people who ever submitted and bartered their honour for the mercy of an enemy."[100] Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy, was compared to Cato both during the war and after his death in 1889. A panegyric declared that "not Cato himself spoke to his Senate at Utica with more dignity and steadfastness than does the Southern President when addressing his suffering fellow countrymen."[101] Shortly after Appomattox, the last battle of the war, Virginia planter Edmund Ruffin, who had fired the opening shot of the Civil War at Fort Sumter, wrapped himself in the Confederate flag and committed suicide at his plantation. Like Cato, he preferred death to living under the tyranny of a (Yankee) Caesar.

Southern oratory and congressional debate before the war had cast the North as a corrupt Rome exerting *imperium* over Southern states. "The North has become like unto Rome," complained Representative Isaac E. Holmes of South Carolina in 1850, "and from the same causes. She has subjected provinces more productive than the Egyptian or African."[102] Editor J. D. B. De Bow wrote that "the Roman Empire, in its most debauched and basest times, never sunk half so low in venality,

corruption, and vulgarity, as our federal government has sunk."[103] Identifying with the Carthaginians, Henry Watkins Miller of North Carolina's General Assembly warned in 1857 that Northern fanaticism was threatening to do to the South what "Roman cupidity and ambition" had done to Carthage.[104] Carthage's commercial empire had been a barrier to Roman expansion in the western Mediterranean. After three wars, Rome definitively defeated Carthage, destroyed its capital, and colonized its territories. Now facing Civil War defeat, Southerners feared they might experience a similar fate.

One outcome of the Civil War was the near destruction of the Southern planter elites and the triumph of Northern capitalists, who emerged from the conflict richer and more numerous than before. In the South, the economic foundations of the planting system were destroyed – slaves were emancipated without compensation to their former owners, plantations were pillaged and burned, and the South was subjected to military domination by the North. The planter class was stripped of most of its wealth and its national political power as the North plundered a prostrate South. As they did in the build-up to the Civil War, in its aftermath Southerners metaphorically cast themselves as victims of an oppressive Roman Empire. Basil Gildersleeve makes the comparison explicit.

> The Yankees hugged themselves at the thought that they were the modern representatives of the ancient Romans. The idea of a great American Republic, or a grand American Empire, with its seat at the Five Points of New York or on the Trimountain of Boston, filled the Yankee mind with "unbounded enthusiasm" and they laid down in advance the Roman programme, *Parcere subjectis et debellare superbos* [6.853 of Virgil's *Aeneid* on Rome's task "to spare the conquered and beat down the haughty"] – which is, being interpreted into their jargon, *strip the submissionists, and squelch the secesh* [the secessionists]. For our part they are heartily welcome to their prototypes . . . A more canting, lying, thievish race than the Roman was never suffered by the Master of history."[105]

At least one Yankee soldier used the language of Roman imperial conquest to describe his experience during the war. H. S. DeForest, soldier in the Eleventh Connecticut, was among those Union troops who had marched victoriously into Richmond. In a letter dated April 3, 1865, he described his experience as "grander and more exultant than even a Roman emperor, leading back his victorious legions with the spoils of conquest, could ever know."[106] In Gildersleeve's and other Southerners' view, just as the Romans ruthlessly conquered and exploited the peoples in the Italian peninsula and then the rest of the ancient Mediterranean, so now the greedy neo-Roman Yankees were dominating and exploiting the downtrodden South.

Just five days after the Civil War ended, President Abraham Lincoln was dead. Southern actor John Wilkes Booth shot Abraham Lincoln with a derringer in the presidential box in Ford's Theater on April 14, 1865. During the Civil War, President Lincoln had suppressed certain freedoms, including the suspension of the writ of

habeas corpus, and had carried the power of presidential edict and executive order independently of Congress further than any previous president. By ignoring the rights of the judicial and legislative branches of the government, Lincoln abused the power of the presidency in making it greater than was allowed by the Constitution. Critics of the president accused him of tyranny: "Let us also remind Lincoln," said one speaker at a New York rally, "that Caesar had his Brutus and Charles the First his Cromwell. Let us also remind the George the Third of the present day that he, too, may have his Cromwell or his Brutus."[107] The same warning was sounded on editorial pages and in the halls of Congress. As one senator asked, "Is this an American Congress or a Roman Senate in the most abject days of the Roman empire? How much more are we to take?"[108]

John Wilkes Booth viewed Lincoln as a Caesar, a tyrant who was destroying the American republic. The naming patterns in Booth's family may have inspired his actions on behalf of liberty against tyranny. Booth's father, the actor Junius Brutus Booth, had been named after the famous Roman clan of the Junii Bruti. Lucius Junius Brutus had played a leading role in the overthrow of the reign of the Etruscan kings and the establishment of the Roman Republic in 509 BCE. His descendent Marcus Junius Brutus was a ringleader in the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BCE. Junius Brutus Booth named his American son after a distant relation, the English libertarian John Wilkes (1727–97), a supporter of liberal reform in England and opponent of King George III, who, as we have seen, the American Revolutionary generation called Caesar. Booth, who had acted in John Howard Payne's *Brutus, or the Fall of Tarquin* and Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, may have been further inspired by the sentiments of those plays. In any case, Booth's assassination of Abraham Lincoln was theatrical to the hilt: after firing his shot, the actor leaped down onto the stage, raised a dagger and cried "*Sic semper tyrannis!*" ("Thus always to tyrants!"), and made a quick exit to a horse waiting outside.[109]

In 1862, in the middle of the Civil War, the Homestead Act was finally passed, providing the free public lands to homesteaders that the National Reform Association had sought since the 1840s; but it did not result in a massive movement of workers to the American West to establish family farms.[110] While the Homestead Act offered 160 acres of the public domain for 10 dollars, it did not provide the necessary credit for people without savings to take up their 160 acres.[111] More importantly, its clauses permitted land grabbing by speculative companies and the eventual concentration of large tracts of land in private hands. By 1871, the Republican Congress had given more than a million and a half acres of public domain in the form of "land grants" to railroad companies operating west of the Mississippi River.[112] Rather than enabling the realization of the Jeffersonian yeoman republic, the Homestead Act contributed to the privatization of the public domain. Contrary to the hopes of antebellum reformers, the Act did not relieve the problems created by industrial capitalism; problems that were exacerbated after the Civil War by urbanization, migrations of African Americans to cities in the North, new

waves of immigration, and growth in the power of industrial monopolies over the nation, causing severe social dislocations and even greater economic disparity.

To many Americans in the post-Civil War North and the South it seemed that the nation was in dire straits. Walt Whitman's writing after the Civil War reflects his dark views on the state of the country. In contrast to the lyrical passion and optimism of his earlier work, Whitman wrote in his *Democratic Vistas*:

> I say that our New World democracy, however great a success in uplifting the masses out of their sloughs, in materialistic development, products, and in a certain highly deceptive superficial popular intellectuality, is, so far, an almost complete failure in its social aspects and in really grand religious, moral, literary, and aesthetic results. *In vain do we march with unprecedented strides to empire so colossal, outvying the antique, beyond Alexander's, beyond the proudest sway of Rome.* In vain have we annexed Texas, California, Alaska, and reached north for Canada and south for Cuba. It is as if we were somehow being endow'd with a vast and thoroughly appointed body and then left with little or no soul.[113]

The consequences for the working man and woman – not to mention the conquered – of this march toward industrial power and imperial dominion were heavy. Yet again, the question was being raised: were imperial might, rapid industrialism, and material advances worth the spiritual and moral cost? The failure of the fight for a yeoman's republic of independent farmers and the plight of the South implied to some at least that history had repeated itself and the cycle of rise and fall had still not been broken.

Calls for land reform as a means of realizing a vision of an egalitarian republic would remain a thread connecting political reform movements from the 1820s through the Populist era at the end of the nineteenth century. But the optimism that fueled workers' movements before the Civil War would be harder to sustain after it. Among other things, post-Civil War Reconstruction resulted in a colossal increase in the power and control monopolies had over the nation. The post-Civil War years were marked by depressions, strikes, and labor unrest. The plight of urban workers, freed slaves, recent immigrants, and farmers became desperate. Labor leaders and socialists increasingly called for radical change, even revolution, rather than land reform. With this shift in ideology, political activists' and reformers' interest in Roman history shifted also, to the Roman civil wars, the bloody collapse of the Roman Republic, and the rise of dictators and Caesars.

Notes

1 In a recent iteration of this view, Schiavone (2000) has argued that the crisis of the Roman Empire was due to the system of slavery, which corrupted and deformed the Roman economy to such an extent that it brought about the collapse of the empire.

2 Walker in Aptheker (1965), 82–3. Thanks to Seth Rockman for drawing my attention to Walker's use of Hannibal.
3 Blacks also claimed links to ancient Ethiopia and Egypt.
4 The next few paragraphs rely on Winterer (2007), 183–90. I am grateful to her for generously sharing her manuscript with me before its publication.
5 Martin R. Delaney to Frederick Douglass, May 20, 1848, in *North Star* (June 9, 1848): 2–3, quoted in Winterer (2007), 185–6.
6 Ibid.
7 Stowe quoted in Hart (1950), 110.
8 Antebellum white reformer Lydia Maria Child wrote an abolitionist assault on black slavery by reference to classical antiquity, especially Greek antiquity, in *An Appeal in Favor of that Class Americans Called Africans* (1833) and *Philothea* (1836). See the discussion in Winterer (2007), 169–75.
9 Ibid., 186–7.
10 Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and the *Cincinnati Enquirer* quoted in ibid., 187. Some of Margaret Garner's children were fathered by white slave owners.
11 After a meeting in Boston, the attendees "separated, after pledging, as did Hannibal, 'Eternal Hostility to Slavery.'" "Declaration of sentiments of the colored citizens of Boston on the Fugitive Slave Bill: To the clergy of Boston," *Liberator* (October 11, 1850): 162.
12 "An address: 'All people are created free and equal,'" *Liberator* (February 28, 1845): 1.
13 G. W. S., "Why not rejoice?" *Liberator* (February 13, 1857): 28.
14 "Letter 1 – no title," *National Era* (March 8, 1849): 37.
15 Garrison (1852), 48–9.
16 "Republics," *Colored American* (August 17, 1839).
17 See, for example: "Slavery in relation to free labor, domestic life, civic virtue, and public morals," *National Era* (June 28, 1855): 104.
18 G. H. Evans "To Gerrit Smith," *People's Rights* (July 24, 1844): 4. In the same letter Evans defined slavery as "being subject to the will of a master, or a master class, by a deprivation of natural rights." See also Gerrit Smith's reply to Evans and Evans's rejoinder, all printed in *People's Rights* (July 24, 1844): 4. Evans was not racist but he prioritized white workers' struggles. "There was no room for oppression in Evan's world, but also no room for consideration of the special nature of the oppression of those victimized differently than his white constituency." Roediger (1999), 80; for further discussion on abolitionism and the labor movement see ibid., 80–7.
19 G. H. Evans, "Rejoinder to Gerrit Smith," *People's Rights* (July 24, 1844): 2.
20 G. Bancroft (1857), 286.
21 G. Bancroft (1834), 417. This clearly exceeded anything Tiberius Gracchus ever proposed.
22 See the discussion of this point in Roediger (1999), 74–80.
23 Speech by Hon. Henry Wilson, MA, "Are working men slaves?" a reply to Hon. J. H. Hammond of South Carolina in the Senate on March 20, 1858, on the Bill to Admit Kansas under the Lecompton Constitution, published in *National Era* (April 29, 1858): 69.

24 "In ancient Rome, the reforms proposed by the Gracchi were resisted by the large slaveholders and land-owners, because their tendency was to limit the field of slave labor by rescuing the public domain from their grasping avarice, and to build up a powerful class of small land-owners and working men, whose interests and votes might control the Republic. Similar reasons will provoke hostility to Land Reform in this country." "Land reform in the Senate," *National Era* (February 7, 1850): 23–4. And, an editorial first published in the *St. Louis Democrat* asserted that: "A most uncompromising struggle is now progressing between the masses and the planters, for the possession of the unoccupied territories . . . The contest for the possession of the national domain, which lasted so long in the Roman Republic, and which is the key of its internal politics, has openly commenced in this country; and here, as well as there, agrarianism, or a fair division of the public domain, has become the terror of the patrician class and the desire of the people." Reprinted in the *National Era* (April 28, 1859): 68.
25 Foner (1995), xxv.
26 Holmes (1855), 618.
27 Ibid., 626. The sentence is from Pliny, *Natural History* xviii.7.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., 622.
30 Ibid., 619.
31 US Representative James Jackson of Georgia quoted in Fox-Genovese and Genovese (2005), 69.
32 D. McCord (1851), 357.
33 Calhoun, "Speech on the reception of abolition petitions," quoted in Harrington (1989), 65.
34 Fitzhugh (1965), 34. The book was first published in 1854.
35 Ibid., 36.
36 Ibid., 38.
37 Ibid., 45, and O'Brien (2004), vol. 2, 976.
38 L. S. McCord (1996), 441.
39 Ibid., 444.
40 Fitzhugh (1965), 35.
41 Fitzhugh (1960), xxiii.
42 Fitzhugh (1965), 44.
43 Grayson quoted by Harrington (1989), 65–6.
44 (1850). "A few thoughts on the death of John C. Calhoun," *Southern Literary Messenger: Devoted to Every Department of Literature, and the Fine Arts* 16/6: 377.
45 Legaré quoted in Fox-Genovese and Genovese (2005), 274. After the summary, he begins his next paragraph, "However that may be."
46 Holmes (1850), 193. Holmes is referring to Aristotle's *Politics*, I. 5.
47 Holmes quoted in Harrington (1989), 68.
48 Dew (1832; 1970), 16.
49 Fitzhugh (1965), 43.
50 Ibid., 44.
51 The motto comes from Virgil, *Eclogue* 1.6.
52 Fischer (2005), 64–5.
53 Randolph quoted in Fischer (2005), 67.

54 Dew (1981), 66.
55 Holmes quoted in Fox-Genovese and Genovese (2005), 288.
56 Remarks of M. R. H. Garnett (1850), 36, quoted in Miles (1971), 271.
57 Holcombe quoted in O'Brien (2004), vol. 2, 654.
58 McCord quoted in Genovese (2002), 463.
59 Lounsbury (1996), 424.
60 For the importance of the Virginia resorts, see Lewis (2001).
61 Lounsbury (1986), 330.
62 O'Brien, introduction to Lounsbury (1995), 2.
63 In a review of her play, one critic wrote about Louisa McCord that "she is wholly unlike any of her sisters of the lyre, and writes with a terseness, vigor, earnestness and masculine energy." DeBow (1852), 428. Another reviewer wrote "Her mental attributes are all masculine . . . and she grapples with subjects to which women seldom incline." "Caius Gracchus: Pomponius, Gracchus," review of *Caius Gracchus*, *Southern Quarterly Review* (1851) 4/7: 62.
64 McCord tutor quoted by Lounsbury (1996), 415.
65 DeBow in *DeBow's Review of the Southern and Western States: Devoted to Commerce, Agriculture, Manufactures* (1851) 1/2: 224; also quoted in Lounsbury (1996), 415; Fox-Genovese and Genovese (2005), 301–4; and Genovese (2002), 472–5. "Here and there, upon the storm driven billows of her history, the form of woman is distinctly visible, and the mother of the Gracchi still stands forth in strong relief, amid that imagery, over which time has no power." (1834) "On the policy of elevating the standard of female education: Addressed to the American Lyceum, May, 1834," *Southern Literary Messenger* 1/4: 169–70. One woman writing for the *Southern Literary Messenger* signed her poems "Cornelia." *Southern Literary Messenger* (1840) 6/12: 838; 842.
66 "We have read the letters of Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi; they make it plain that her sons were nursed not less by their mother's speech than at her breast." Cicero (1962), 211.
67 Durrill (1999), 495.
68 Quoted in ibid., 488.
69 *Caius Gracchus: A Tragedy in Five Acts.* L. S. McCord (1996): 161–232. All quotations are from this edition. III, 4, 8–9.
70 Ibid., III, 4, 33–40.
71 Ibid., III, 4, 111.
72 Ibid., II, 4, 166–7.
73 "Man has, in every station, rights his due. / Our slaves look to their masters for support. / The very claims we hold upon their labor / Make us as a rule to tender them again / If placed by circumstance, necessity, / Beneath our rule, protection thence we owe: / And he evading basely these, degrades / Himself below the thus defrauded slave," orates Gracchus. Ibid., II, 4, 24–32.
74 Ibid., III, 4, 114–23.
75 Calhoun, "Speech on the Oregon Bill," June 27, 1848, quoted in Furstenberg (2003), 27.
76 The statue was displayed in Charleston from 1850 to 1861 and then removed to Columbia, South Carolina, for safekeeping during the war. It was destroyed in the burning of Columbia in 1865. Wunder (1991), 116. Lewis Cass called him the *Ultimus*

Romanus. Congressional Globe, 29th Cong., 1st Sess, 1846. Appendix, 430, quoted in Miles (1971), 268. Senator Calhoun also reminded lawyer and orator Daniel Webster of a "Senator of Rome," and statesman and diplomat Henry W. Hilliard claimed that "It was easy to fancy, when you heard him that you were listening to an oration from the lips of a Roman senator, who had formed his style in the severe school of Greece." D. Webster (1903), vol. 10, 101, and Hilliard (1855), 450, both quoted in Miles (1971), 268. One eulogy for Calhoun compared him to the admirable Romans of the early and middle Republic: "No worthy of the elder Republic of Rome could have been more simple-hearted than Calhoun. Nothing in him was meant for the eye of the world; his personal tastes and habits, even his dress and his chamber, were remarkable for their plain neatness." (1850) "A few thoughts on the death of John C. Calhoun," *Southern Literary Messenger: Devoted to Every Department of Literature, and the Fine Arts* 16/6: 377.

77 In 1832, the states rights theory was put to the test in the Nullification Crisis after South Carolina passed an ordinance that claimed to nullify federal tariffs. The tariffs favored Northern manufacturing interests over Southern agricultural concerns, and the South Carolina legislature declared them to be unconstitutional. Daniel Webster referred to Calhoun as Scipio Africanus South Caroliniensis. D. Webster (1903), vol. 8, 238–9, quoted in Miles (1971), 268. Noah Webster also referred to Calhoun as Scipio Africanus South Caroliniensis. "Mr. Webster's speech, in answer to Mr. Calhoun – March 22, 1838," *Niles' Weekly Register* (April 28, 1838): 132.

78 Henry (1850), 57–8.

79 "Nullification – and so forth: comments on the above. From the *Globe*, July 23," *Niles' Weekly Register* (August 3, 1833): 384.

80 Gildersleeve (1998), 388. Gildersleeve, one of the first Americans to study classics in Germany, taught classics at the University of Virginia for 20 years and then started the first German-style graduate program in the country at Johns Hopkins University in 1876. He was passionate about the classics, and especially ancient Greece.

81 Ibid., 372.

82 For Washington at Valley Forge and the performance of *Cato*, see chapter 1.

83 Reviewer quoted in Lounsbury (1995), 486.

84 The tearful parting of Hector and Andromache was a popular subject for embroidery. Lounsbury points out that McCord was also influenced by Shakespeare – Caius' wife, Licinia, and mother, Cornelia, frame his actions and illustrate his tragedy as Virgilia and Volumnia do for Coriolanus in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*. Lounsbury (1986), 331.

85 L. S. McCord (1996), V, 1, 133–9.

86 Ibid., II, 5, 46; V, 1, 186–7; V, 1,196–204.

87 Ibid., V, 5, 78–80.

88 Ibid., V, 5, 83–6. "She translates her manhood to her son." Lounsbury (1986), 335.

89 Calhoun quoted in Fox-Genovese and Genovese (2005), 107. In a eulogy for Calhoun, one man wrote that Calhoun "always rejected timid counsels and used to say, '*I will do my duty, no matter what the consequences.*'" Italics in the original. (1850), "A few thoughts on the death of John C. Calhoun," *Southern Literary Messenger: Devoted to Every Department of Literature, and the Fine Arts* 16/6: 377.

90 McCord quoted in Lounsbury (1986), 327; and Lounsbury(1996), 438.

91 McCord quoted in Lounsbury (1996), 439.
92 "What she could not be, she could perform; and she became Caius Gracchus. . . ." Lounsbury (1996), 427. Lounsbury notes that Lousia S. McCord's friend Mary Chestnut described McCord in her journal as "she who wrote *The Mother of the Gracchi*." Lounsbury (1986), 331.
93 DeBow (1852), 428. A twentieth-century reader of McCord's play commented that "the characters of the play speak the word 'Senator' with such bitterness that one inevitably hears beside it the adjective 'Yankee.'" Thorp (1949), 192.
94 One female critic has suggested that Louisa (like Cornelia?) may have dreamed of realizing in her son the political actions which her sex denied her. Thorp (1949), 200.
95 Genovese (2002), 474–5.
96 Lounsbury (1996), 414.
97 Thorp (1949), 213.
98 Ronnick (1997), 19.
99 Pollard (1957), 360–8. Pollard also quoted by Ronnick (1997), 20–1.
100 Pollard (1957), Plutarch cited at 365–8. Pollard also wrote *Southern History of the War* (1865) and *The Lost Cause* (1866), his most popular book. His construction of the war was influenced by the Scottish struggle for independence and the novels of Sir Walter Scott but also, as Ronnick (1997) has shown, by Cato the Younger and the end of the Roman Republic.
101 Panegyric quoted by Ronnick (1997), 19.
102 *Congressional Globe*, 31st Cong., 1st Sess., 1850. Appendix, 1281. Holmes quoted in Miles (1971), 269.
103 DeBow quoted in Miles (1971), 269.
104 H. W. Miller (1857), 27.
105 Gildersleeve (1998), 120–1.
106 DeForest's letter quoted in Ronnick (1997), 22.
107 *New York Herald* (May 19, 1863), quoted by Kauffman (2004), 200.
108 Kentucky Senator Lazarus Powell in *Congressional Globe*, 37th Cong., 3rd Sess., 1061, quoted in Kauffman (2004), 200.
109 The Great Seal of Virginia (1776) had as its motto "*Sic semper tyrannis*."
110 Bronstein (1999), 243–4.
111 Trachtenberg (1982), 21–2.
112 Ibid., 22. Trachtenberg points out that the railroad companies proceeded to extract further profits through selling off large sections of their grants to individuals and companies.
113 Whitman (1996), 962. Emphasis added.

4

Corporate Caesars and Radical Reformers

On September 18, 1873, the Philadelphia investment house of Jay Cooke failed, causing frightened bankers to demand repayment of loans. Investors sold stocks in order to protect their capital. As stocks plunged in value, borrowers could not pay their debts. Hundreds of industrialist entrepreneurs were ruined. The financial crash ushered in an industrial depression that lasted until 1878. Businesses tightened their belts and reduced workers' wages or fired them. Unemployment soared and workers were in dire straits. On July 17, 1877, when the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad cut wages for the second time in a year, workers in Martinsburg, West Virginia, rebelled. They refused to let trains move until wages were restored. This was the spark that ignited the passions of workers across the nation. Protests and sympathy strikes erupted across the country. In Chicago, the Workingman's Party organized demonstrations that attracted twenty thousand people. In New York, eight to ten thousand people cheered impassioned pro-labor speeches in Tompkins Square. In St. Louis, workers called a general strike and briefly established what they called a "genuine commune." Men of property and wealth feared an uprising like that of the Paris Commune in 1871. But, after two weeks, the "Great Railroad Strike," as it came to be known, had collapsed. Industrialists hired their own private police forces and requested help from the National Guard and state governments to protect industrial capital's rights of property. There were arrests, battles, injuries, and deaths as private militia moved from city to city putting down the strikes. Federal troops supplemented the militia and the labor uprising was crushed. After the strike, armories were built in cities across the nation to protect capitalists and their property from the "mob." But memories of the long and bloody strike now led many to wonder whether the American republic would be destroyed by social wars.

In the wake of the strike, industrialists and their supporters increasingly cautioned about the "dangers" of socialism and communism and the growing potential in the United States for insurrection.[1] Strikers accused the police in Chicago during the 1877 strike of serving as a praetorian guard (the Roman emperors' private imperial army) for capitalist rulers. The police were

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> in the employ of the rich, trod on the laws and the constitution & clubbed & shot . . . these were no longer public securing officers; they constituted a herd of soldiers for the big corporations, like the robber-knights' foot soldiers, like the Praetorian bands of ancient Rome; these were the sluggers and bouncers in the employ of the rich.[2]

Using the analogy of the collapse of the Roman Republic, labor reformers and socialists (and later Populists) pointed out that just as civil unrest had been used to justify concentrations of power in ancient Rome, so too were similar justifications made in America for militias, federal troops, and armories.[3]

Political reformers and labor activists worried that the United States was, in political reformer James Baird Weaver's words, "traveling with frightful velocity along the same road which led Rome to the grave."[4] America seemed to be telescoping Rome's decline into a few short decades. Walt Whitman urged Americans to face and treat the cancerous corruption that was spreading across the nation.

> I say we had best look our times and lands searchingly in the face, like a physician diagnosing some deep disease . . . The spectacle is appaling [sic] . . . The depravity of the business classes of our country is not less than it has been supposed, but infinitely greater. The official services of America, national, state, and municipal, in all their branches, except the judiciary, are saturated in corruption, bribery, falsehood, maladministration; and the judiciary is tainted. The great cities reek with respectable as much as non-respectable robbery and scoundrelism.[5]

Like many of their antebellum predecessors, workers, reformers, and politicians deployed analogies to Rome in speeches and writings. The times called for desperate measures, and many downtrodden American workers and farmers, and their leaders, called for radical change, even class war. The end of republican government in the wake of social wars and the rise of imperial military rule seemed a real possibility in America.

Analogies to the rise and fall of Rome were one of the most widely used rhetorical devices of the last third of the nineteenth century, appearing in literary forms in newspapers, magazines, cartoons, labor speeches and writings, and memoirs. For many Americans, robber barons, class warfare, strikes, conspicuous consumption, and corrupt political machines evoked images of imperial Rome – its decadent rich, huge landed estates, tremendous economic inequality, and corrupt government. Radical reformers and social critics were interested in the bloody transformation of the Roman Republic into an imperial regime and the subsequent slow collapse of Roman civilization due, in the views of labor reformers and other critics, to greed – private accumulation and public spoliation.

Thomas Nast, a political cartoonist for the widely circulated magazine *Harper's Weekly*, illustrated the tumult and pervasive corruption of the post-Civil War era. His most famous political cartoon, *The Tammany Tiger Loose – What Are You Going To Do About It?* was published in *Harper's Weekly* on November 11, 1871 (figure 4.1). Nast's subject was the plundering of New York City's municipal

Figure 4.1 Thomas Nast, *The Tammany Tiger Loose – What Are You Going To Do About It? Harper's Weekly* (November 11, 1871).

government by Boss William Magear Tweed. Nast set Boss Tweed and his gang in a Roman arena; dressed in togas they fill in the place of Roman emperor and Roman elites, as they watch a tiger (graft and greed) devour what is left of the fallen republic, symbolized by Columbia. The cartoon's power relies on images of gladiatorial combats and the slaughter of innocent Christians in the Roman arena popular in fiction and in paintings, especially the Roman arena paintings of Jean-Léon Gérôme (figure 4.2). As leader of Tammany Hall, a benevolent association founded in 1789 that had become a major controlling force in the Democratic Party by the end of the first quarter of the nineteenth century, Tweed controlled a network of city officials and Democratic Party workers. The "Tweed Ring" was notorious for its corruption. The cartoon's message is clear: as in ancient Rome, so in New York; corrupt politicians oppress and exploit citizens and destroy the body politic.[6]

In his 1880 cartoon *"The Die is Cast" – Caesar and Pompey in Ohio*, Thomas Nast portrayed two contenders for the 1880 Republican presidential nomination, Treasury Secretary (and former senator) John Sherman of Ohio and Senator James Blaine of Maine, as quarreling Roman generals and politicians who seek to gain power for their own sake, rather than the public good (figure 4.3). In the center of the cartoon, Sherman (left) and Blaine (right) wear the garb of Julius Caesar and Pompey, respectively.[7] Here, Rome signifies soldiers, generals, and conquests.

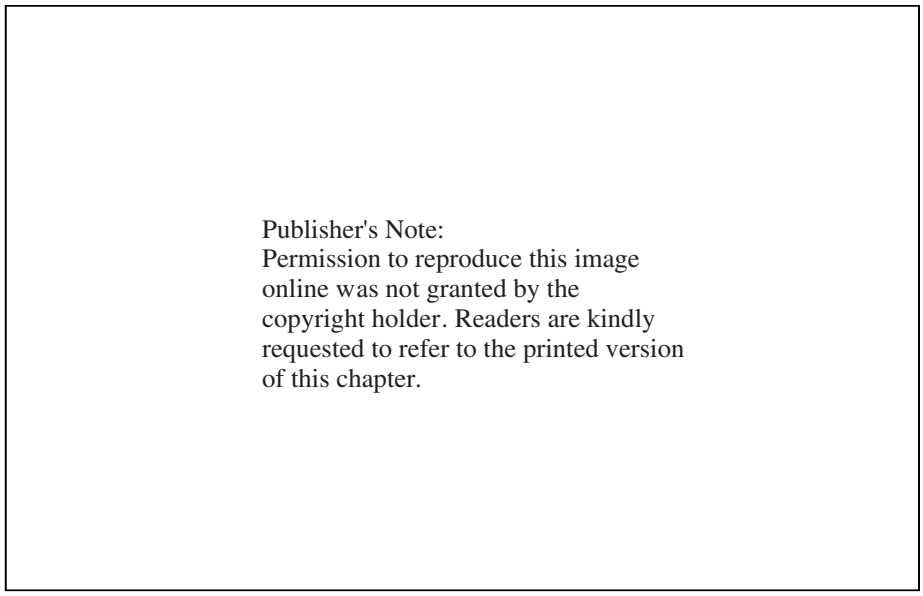
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Figure 4.2 Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Ave Caesar! Morituri Te Salutant* (*Hail Caesar! Those Who Are About to Die Salute You*), 1859. Oil on canvas. Photo Credit: Yale University Art Gallery/Art Resources, NY.

Nast's identification of Republican candidates with ambitious and self-interested Roman generals turns politics into war and the nation becomes the spoils of war.

After the failure of the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, socialist Henry Demarest Lloyd thought of Rome.[8] In his view, the railroad barons acted like wealthy Roman elites. Like them, they carved up public land into their own imperial domains. Their ruthless wage cuts resembled the rapacious Roman aristocracy's exploitation of Roman farmers. Lloyd noted specific Roman parallels with the United States: "the dissatisfaction of the poor, the armies of the rich – the Senate . . . [these were] the great causes of the Roman catastrophe."[9] Using the familiar metaphor of slavery to describe the plight of workers in the aggressive industrial capitalism of the post-Civil War era, Lloyd called for an American Spartacus to lead a revolt. "As long as there are slaves there is a chance to raise a Spartacus for the Slaves," he wrote. "We already have had warnings of the final struggle between the rich and poor – just as Rome saw the phantoms of the Goths and Vandals at its gates more than once before it was overwhelmed by the flood."[10] The oppressors of the modern world, Lloyd asserted, were the "Vanderbilts and Rothschilds" who "can buy governors and laws."[11] Lloyd, who published an attack on the Standard Oil Company in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1881, wrote that the owners of such huge monopolies were "industrial Caesars," "corporate Caesars," and "commercial Caesars."[12] The capitalists' factories and fortunes were their empires and they

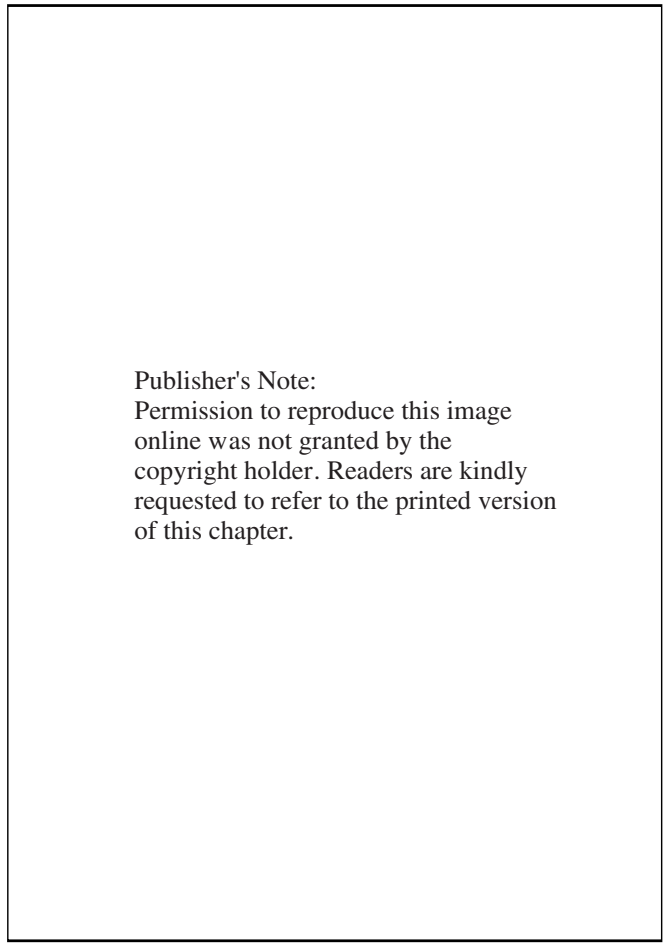
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Figure 4.3 Thomas Nast, *"The Die is Cast" – Caesar and Pompey in Ohio*, *Harper's Weekly* (April 17, 1880). Courtesy of HarpWeek.

"commit rapine and call it 'business.'"[13] Lloyd's description of the avaricious acts of the capitalists echo Tacitus' British barbarian Calgagus' description of the conquering Romans:

> Robbers of the world, having by their universal plunder exhausted the land, they rifle the deep. If the enemy be rich, they are rapacious; if he be poor, they lust for dominion; neither the east nor the west has been able to satisfy them. Alone among men they covet with equal eagerness poverty and riches. To robbery, slaughter, plunder, they give the lying name of empire; they make a solitude and call it peace.[14]

America's capitalists, Lloyd suggests, are like conquering Romans who plunder and call it business.

In *Wealth Against Commonwealth* Lloyd wrote, "If our civilization is destroyed, as [the British historian] Macaulay predicted, it will not be by his [Macaulay's] barbarians from below, our barbarians come from above."[15] Capitalists controlled the government and the military. Workers were little more than wage slaves. Lloyd warned that "either the attention of the people must be arrested and turned into resolution and resolution into action or else the country will drift into a convulsion. . . . greater than the convulsion that wrecked the Roman Empire."[16] Plutocracy was destroying the American republic.

In the 1880s, the plight of urban workers, recent immigrants, freedmen, and farmers was desperate. Banks foreclosed on mortgages and railroads imposed high freight rates. Northern investment in machines to produce cash crops led to the displacement of farmers into cities already bulging with immigrants.[17] Repeated economic depressions and labor unrest ensued. During the course of the 1880s there were almost ten thousand strikes and lockouts.[18] Looking back at her life as a socialist activist, Kate Richards O'Hare described how drought and the cycle of national depressions forced her family to abandon the family farm in Kansas in 1887 and move to the slums of Kansas City. Her vivid description helps us see the impact of hard times on individual men and women:

> Then comes the memory of a Kansas drought, followed by one of the periodical panics which sweep over our country. Days and weeks of hazy nightmare when father's face was gray and set, when mother smiled bravely when he or we children were near, but when we sometimes found tears upon her cheeks if we came upon her unexpectedly. Of course, it was all beyond our comprehension. A horrible something that we could not fathom had settled down over our lives, but the day when the realness of it all was forced home came all too soon. The stock was sold, the home dismantled and one day father kissed us good-bye and started away to the city to find work. He who had always been master of his own domain, who had hewn his destiny bare-handed from the virgin soil, forced to go out and beg some other man for a chance to labor, an opportunity to use his hands. Though I could not comprehend it then the bitterness of it all was seared upon my memory and I never see a strong man vainly seeking and begging for work that my whole soul does not revolt. Then came the day when we left the ranch and went to the city to take up the life of a wage-worker's family in the poverty-cursed section of the town. For, of course, no other was possible for us for father's wages were only nine dollars a week and nine dollars is not much to support a family of five. Of that long, wretched winter following the panic of 1887 the memory can never be erased, never grow less bitter. The poverty, the misery, the want, the wan-faced women and hunger pinched children, men tramping the streets by day and begging for a place in the police stations or turning footpads by night, the sordid, grinding, pinching poverty of the workless workers and the frightful, stinging, piercing cold of that winter in Kansas City will always stay with me as a picture of inferno, such as Dante never painted.[19]

Kate O'Hare eventually found work as a mechanic. Fellow workers introduced her to Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*, Henry Demarest Lloyd's *Wealth Against*

Commonwealth, and the *Communist Manifesto*. The turning point in her radicalization came when she met labor leader and union organizer Mother Jones, who introduced her to socialism. O'Hare dedicated her life to socialism – as an organizer, lecturer, and writer – and she became an international secretary of the Socialist Party.

Later in her life, O'Hare was charged with violation of the Espionage Act for her outspoken criticism of World War I.[20] She regularly gave a speech entitled "Socialism and the war" in which she suggested that capitalist greed was the cause of the war. She spoke in her own defense at her trial. She was convicted of sedition and sent to prison, an experience she compared to Roman slavery:

> With the clang of the prison gates behind me I was thrown back two thousand years to the position of a female hostage of the Imperial Roman Empire, sold into slavery because she had dared to challenge the power of Rome. . . . In the months I spent in prison were compressed all that womanhood has endured from the slave marts of Rome to the deadly grind of the ultra-modern sweatshop.[21]

In O'Hare's prison, women were forced to work "in the prison slave pits" for nine hours a day to make overalls for the Oberman Manufacturing Company. In O'Hare's formulation, the American government, its penal system, and capitalism are made analogous to her views on political oppression and enforced slavery in imperial Rome. In her interpretation of Roman history, political and economic oppression were intertwined just as they are in America. Speaking out against injustice in Rome and in America resulted in degradation and bondage.

O'Hare located herself in a long line of oppressed women and in a lineage of male political leaders and activists who spoke out against oppression. In her socialist education she undoubtedly came across Socialist Labor Party organizer and activist Cyrenus Osborne Ward's *A History of the Ancient Working People* (later called *The Ancient Lowly*).[22] Few books were quoted more often by labor orators of the late nineteenth century than Ward's. It is a study of slave revolts and the life of the working classes in antiquity written for, and widely used by, the workers' movement. *The Ancient Lowly* gave nineteenth-century labor movements a history and, in Ward's words, "a classical solidity and grandeur."[23]

Ward grew up on a farm in Illinois, became a skilled mechanic in Chicago, and went to Oberlin College. When he became a machinist in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, he became involved in the labor movement. After the Civil War, he traveled extensively in Europe during the years when the international labor movement was being organized, and he attended several labor conferences. While in Europe, he met Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, and the Roman historian Theodor Mommsen and he gathered material for his life's work, a history of the working classes of ancient Greece and Rome. He wrote weekly letters, which were published in the *New York Sun* and then the *New York Tribune*, which he signed "Mechanic Abroad." The letters were widely read. When he returned to the United States he became active in the labor movement as a writer, lecturer, and political organizer, publishing in

1876 a five-part article in the *American Socialist* called "The social movement of the ancients." This set out Ward's belief that modern socialism was a descendent of the working-class movements of antiquity, a theme more fully expressed in his 1888 magnum opus, *The Ancient Lowly*.

In Ward's view, the working classes in antiquity were the true forefathers of today's struggling wage slaves. Ward did not make a distinction between slaves and free workers; he conflated both into one category, the "working peoples." He worried that the great strikes and uprisings of the working peoples of the ancient world were almost unknown. Ward excavated the remains of those movements, which had become hard to discern because of the "nicely covered tracks of the middleman's historiographers."[24] His toils enabled the formation of counter-narratives to the common celebratory interpretations of the words and deeds of Cato, Cicero, Brutus, and other iconic Romans. In contrast to the usual middle- and upper-class admiration and praise for Cicero, for example, Ward wrote that Cicero had been "the most terrible enemy of the plebeians, or, as we prefer to call them, the working classes, whose sense of justice was confined to his own interpretation of laws favoring the privileged class."[25] Cicero was the "chieftain of egotism," who insulted the poor working classes by saying: "the working classes, by very virtue of their toil, are mean and to be despised."[26] *The Ancient Lowly* rescued the experiences of the ancient slaves and working classes from the dustbin of history.

Roman antiquity, Ward believed, mirrored the present. "The same turbulent, warlike millions swarmed the cities and thoroughfares then, as now. The same unorganized and inequitable methods of production and apportionment, the same egoism and sacrifice of neighbor for the aggrandizement of self . . ."[27] Slave revolts were ancient "strikes" and slaves in antiquity were "working men." Roman social organizations such as the *sodalicia* (clubs or fraternity meetings for social or business purposes) and *collegia* (trade guilds, clubs, or fraternities) that provided social and economic aid to their members were, he thought, "genuine labor societies."[28] To his mind, the modern descendents of these societies were the producer and consumer cooperatives that the Knights of Labor and the farmer–labor alliances were struggling to create in America. Capitalism undermined brotherhood and equality. Alternative institutions, Ward asserted, could – and would – establish a new cooperative commonwealth.

Tiberius Gracchus, Spartacus, and Jesus emerge as the major heroes in *The Ancient Lowly*'s pages on Rome. Ward's Tiberius Gracchus was a labor hero who worked tirelessly on behalf of the poor. In praising him, Ward quotes the ubiquitous passage from Plutarch's life of Tiberius Gracchus where he speaks movingly about the plight of the homeless and landless Roman poor. Attempts at agrarian reforms in Rome seemed to Ward to be "a wonderful episode in Communism of which the Gracchi are the historic heroes."[29] Ward's Spartacus was "in all respects a workingman."[30] Those who enslaved Spartacus were cruel capitalists, and he became "the last of the ancient labor revolters."[31] Jesus was the supreme

working-class hero of antiquity: a communist, a peripatetic labor agitator, and an itinerant social reformer. He was killed "for loving labor and laborers and denouncing hatreds together with the system on which they are based. He ruled that these working people were fully equal to any other class."[32] Christianity, in short, "from the beginning was an industrial movement, spreading among the working class, who saw in this new religion a promise of economic emancipation."[33]

A millennial fervor infuses the politics of *The Ancient Lowly*. By the time of Jesus, according to Ward, "the great world was . . . like Vesuvius on the eve of an eruption."[34] Americans, he believed, were living in comparably volatile times. A committed Christian and a socialist, Ward referred to the labor movement of his times as a "sort of second coming."[35] Neither an opiate nor a metaphor for class unrest, religion for Ward had transformative powers.[36] Putting the message of the gospels into practice and living the apostolic life had revolutionary implications. Socialism would revive Christianity's radical potential in the present. Socialism infused with Christianity could form the basis for universal community, a brotherhood of humanity.

Like C. Osborne Ward, Kate Richards O'Hare, and Henry Demarest Lloyd, journalist Henry George was troubled by the paradox of progress – the industrial and technological innovations and inventions of his age – and poverty, the multitudes of suffering poor. Why did colossal wealth co-exist with extreme poverty? George, whose book on economic and social theory, *Progress and Poverty* (1879), was to make him one of the most famous men in America, was no stranger to hard times. During the depression of the 1870s he and his family faced hunger and poverty in San Francisco, where his employment as a journalist was precarious at best. In San Francisco, in the wake of the strike of the summer of 1877, George had an epiphany that explained the nation's ills and his own. "Like a flash it came upon me that there was a reason for advancing poverty with advancing wealth. With the growth of population land grows in value, and the men who work it must pay for the privilege."[37] The problem was that as land become scarcer, its value went up and led to monopoly profits. "There is in reality no conflict between labor and capital," he argued in *Progress and Poverty*, "the true conflict is between labor and monopoly."[38]

Henry George believed the conflict between labor and monopoly had plagued most societies including ancient Greece and Rome. In George's interpretation of classical history, it was the struggle between the idea of equal rights to the soil and the tendency to monopolize it in individual possession that caused the internal conflicts of Greece and Rome, "and it was the final triumph of this tendency that destroyed both."[39] Like other reformers, George constructed a particular Roman history shaped by the concerns of the present. Each citizen in Rome, explained George, once had his "homestead plot" but, over time, Italy, and then the empire, became the private preserve of the wealthy elites. Referring to the huge land grants given away by the American Senate to railroad companies and other industries, George observed: "The [Roman] Senate granted away the public domain in large

tracts, just as our Senate is doing now; and the fusion of the little farms into large estates by purchase, by force, and by fraud, went on, until whole provinces were owned by two or three proprietors, and chained slaves had taken the place of the sturdy peasantry of Italy."[40] Monopolization of land, George concluded, was the root cause of poverty and inequality in antiquity and in modern America. A new breed of plutocrats had emerged after the Civil War, George complained, "who toil not, neither do they spin." These were the robber barons whose land grabs, monopolies, and control of politics were threatening the very survival of the American republic.[41]

"Whence shall come the new barbarians?" George asked rhetorically. "Go through the squalid quarters of great cities, and you may see, even now, their gathering hordes!"[42] He connected land monopoly to the volatile state of the immigrant urban poor. George worried that the poverty, deprivation, and squalid conditions of urban life were leading to a moral and mental breakdown of the populace. If the poor were not treated more equitably, they would erupt into riots and anarchy and, ultimately, destroy American civilization. In his view, the barbarism that destroyed Rome came from within not from outside of Rome. Americans should pay attention to the historical example of Rome:

> Long before Goth or Vandal had broken through the cordon of the legions, even while her frontiers were advancing, Rome was dead at the heart. Great estates had ruined Italy. Inequality had dried up the strength and destroyed the vigor of the Roman world. Government became despotism, which even assassination could not temper; patriotism became servility; vices the most foul flaunted themselves in public; literature sank to puerilities; learning was forgotten; fertile districts became waste without the ravages of war – everywhere inequality produced decay, political, mental, moral, and material. The barbarism which overwhelmed Rome came not from without, but from within.[43]

As in Rome, so in America: the modern barbarians would come from America's lower classes, in "the heart of our great cities . . . where poverty and ignorance might produce a race of Huns fiercer than any who followed Attila, and of Vandals more destructive than those led by Genseric."[44] The convulsions that will destroy American civilization, George warned, will come from the social uprisings and savagery of the urban poor in the nation's teeming cities.

Henry George's solution to poverty and other social problems caused by private ownership of the land was a single tax on land. Capitalists who used the land should pay a tax on the value of ground rents that had accrued from increases in the value of land. This would provide the revenue needed by the government and eliminate the need for other taxes. *Progress and Poverty* sold extremely well; by December of 1880 it was in its fifth printing and by 1905 it was estimated to have sold two million copies. Many children grew up, as the Midwestern writer Mary Austin did, to suppose that *Progress and Poverty* "was something like the Bible, only more important."[45] George was a popular speaker and active politically – he

ran for mayor of New York City on a United Labor party ticket in 1886, narrowly losing to the Democratic candidate while decisively defeating Republican Theodore Roosevelt.

To Henry George and Henry Demarest Lloyd, a well-ordered society looked like antebellum America, which for them was, in John L. Thomas's formulation, "a remembered arcadia, pastoral, resting on diffused proprietorship and peopled with farmers, mechanics, artisans, and small tradesmen, all living and producing harmoniously with a network of local loyalties and natural limits."[46] This vision goes back, ultimately, to the Jeffersonian Republic of yeoman-farmers. It had been kept alive through the aspirations of the National Reform Association, the Free Soil community in the North, the early Radical Republican Party, the short-lived Greenback Labor Party, some strands of socialism, and Henry George's eclectic thought. In the late 1880s and 1890s it blossomed again in the Populist Party. The Populist Party (the popular name for the People's Party of America) was the last and most enduring political expression of this vision of a producer republic. Although only officially formed in 1892, it was the culmination of decades of radical social and economic thought, including programs of labor reform, and urban and agrarian protests.

Socialists, Populists, and reformers of many kinds agreed that the concentration of wealth, land, and political power in a plutocracy left America in danger of repeating the Roman Republic's transformation from a healthy republic of small farmers into an empire ruled by the ultra rich. The 1892 *People's Party Campaign Book* defined the party as: "The protest of the plundered against the plunderers – of the victim against the robbers . . . Under the Banking and Bonded Systems all the Roads of Produce lead to the Rome of Imperial Plutocracy and the ends of the earth may be sought without finding any place where tyranny is not felt."[47] The *Campaign Book* excoriated the new Caesars, the railroad robber barons: "Under the exercise of the right of 'Eminent Domain,' under the specious pretext of fairly obtaining a right of way, the Rail Roads seize your lands, eject your family, and if necessary . . . have you shot down like dogs."[48] The heads of giant American corporations were "more cruel than the Caesars."[49] Pointing to the rapid development of plutocracy over the course of the 1890s, politician and statesman William Jennings Bryan thundered against the influence of corporate capital over government and elections and made it comparable to what he claimed had corrupted Rome:

> To make money, money by any means, lawful or unlawful, became the universal passion. Money! The cry was still money! Money was the one thought, from the highest Senator to the poorest wretch who sold his vote in the Comitia . . . a mere subject could maintain no rights against a member of the haughty oligarchy which controlled the civilized world. Such, generally, the Roman republic had become, or was tending to become, in the years which followed the fall of Carthage. Public spirit in the masses was dead, or sleeping; the commonwealth was a plutocracy . . . What is to be the end? Are we not following in the footsteps of Rome?[50]

Representatives of the new Populist party assembled in Omaha on July 4, 1892, where they consciously set out to write a second Declaration of Independence. Writer and activist Ignatius Donnelly wrote the passionate preamble to the 1892 Populist platform. "We meet in the midst of a nation brought to the verge of moral, political and material ruin," Donnelly orated:

> Corruption dominates the ballot box, the legislatures, the Congress, and touches even the ermine of the bench. . . . The newspapers are subsidized or muzzled; public opinion silenced; business prostrated, our homes covered with mortgages, labor impoverished, and the land concentrated in the hands of capitalists . . . the fruits of the toil of millions are boldly stolen to build up colossal fortunes. . . . Assembled on the anniversary of the birth of the illustrious man who led the first great revolution of this continent against oppression, filled with the sentiments which actuated that grand generation, we seek to restore the government of the republic to the hands of the "plain people" with whom it originated. Our doors are open to all points of the compass. We ask all men to join with us and help us.[51]

Like the members of many nineteenth-century reform movements and alternative parties, Populists considered themselves the spokespeople for the true America, an America they believed had been seized by capitalists, corporations, national banks, rings, and trusts. The forces of capital (and monopoly) had ballooned and the liberties of America were in grave peril.

Tom Watson, Populist leader and vice-presidential candidate in 1896, passionately invoked Thomas Jefferson: "Did he dream that in one hundred years or less his Party would be prostituted to the vilest purposes of monopoly . . . and that the liberty and prosperity of the country would be . . . constantly and corruptly sacrificed to Plutocratic greed in the name of Jeffersonian Democracy?"[52] In the Republican Party's early days, Watson wrote, it was a popular movement but it had now become an "aristocratic decadence."[53] Populists reaffirmed the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian principles of republicanism and producerism for Americans in the late nineteenth century. Their enemies were manufacturers responsible for "wage slavery," banks that monopolized credit, and land syndicates that monopolized land.[54] Believing that the producer deserves the fruit of his or her labor, Populists argued that radical political intervention was necessary to save the republic.

In the Populist critique of the state of the nation, land monopoly and plutocracy were the root causes of the American republic's decline, just as had been the case for Rome. Populists warned Americans in no uncertain terms about the dangers of repeating Rome's trajectory. James Baird Weaver, the People's Party presidential candidate in 1892, asserted that:

> The greatest crime of all ages [is], the usurpation of the soil . . . [and] injustice of this character led to the downfall of every nation of antiquity. Nations which persist in degrading and enslaving labor always perish . . . Such were the results in Rome in the days of her greatest power. Such will be the sequel in America if we refuse to recognize the perils of our situation.[55]

In Weaver's view, the impoverishment of the Roman citizen farmer and worker resulted in a decline of civic virtue, which in turn led to the weakening of the health of the body politic; the same fate, he and others warned, awaited America.

Conspicuous consumption and extreme poverty side by side provoked moral outrage in reformers.[56] In his *A Call to Action*, Weaver devoted a chapter to Dives and Lazarus – the millionaire and the pauper – and provided plentiful examples of the extravagance of the rich and the misery of the poor. At one upper-class dinner party in New York, each lady found concealed in her napkin a gold bracelet with the monogram of the host engraved in the center. At another, the wife of a noted millionaire wore a dress studded with a vast number of diamonds, attended by two attendants who kept watch over her train, valued at over a million dollars.[57] At the conclusion of another party "cigarettes were passed around . . . each cigarette was rolled, not in white paper, but in a one hundred dollar bill and the initials of the host were engraved in gold letters."[58] Such flaunting of wealth – the rich literally having money to burn – inevitably led to comparisons with the notorious decadence of imperial Rome. "The poison of gold has debauched and corrupted American Society," wrote a critic of his own class, Frederick Townsend Martin, and "it has led to a degree of ostentation and of luxury, and even of vice and profligacy, comparable with that of the Roman Empire under [the emperor] Heliogabalus."[59] Martin suggested Americans needed the Gracchi or a Marius, a tribune of the people – a leader who would overturn the corrupt and decadent plutocracy of the day.[60]

James B. Weaver noted that at the same time such wasteful entertainments were occurring, the newspapers canvassed the unemployed of New York and determined that one hundred and fifty thousand people were daily – and unsuccessfully – seeking work within the city limits. Another one hundred and fifty thousand, he wrote, earn less than 60 cents a day – and thousands of these were poor girls who worked from 11 to 16 hours a day.[61] Jacob Riis's photographs of the poor in New York illustrate their misery in compelling detail; his *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) shows the price paid in human suffering for the plutocracy's conspicuous consumption.

A few plutocrats spent a fraction of their wealth on libraries, museums, and other civic amenities, many of which were built in neoclassical splendor. The Italian historian of ancient Rome Guglielmo Ferraro was struck by what he saw as parallels between ancient Roman displays of civic munificence and those he saw around him in modern America: "Every city, then," he noted about ancient Rome, "had her own millionaire benefactors, her little Carnegies, her Huntingtons, Morgans, and Rockefellers in miniature."[62] The Roman pantheon and Carnegie Hall are comparable. "Agrippa and Carnegie," he concluded, "were moved by the same notions of civic zeal."[63] No doubt Andrew Carnegie would have liked the comparison. "Without wealth there can be no Maecenas," Carnegie wrote in his defense of wealth and capitalism, explicitly comparing the wealthy capitalist to the famous Roman patron of the arts during the Emperor Augustus' principate.[64] Carnegie

pointed to the Cooper Institute (founded by millionaire industrialist Peter Cooper in 1859 to provide adult education to the poor) and the New York Public Library as examples of the benefits of capitalism. The philanthropy of these modern Maecenases fostered the arts and benefited the working and middle classes. The "present intense individualism," Carnegie argued, leads to "an ideal state, in which the surplus wealth of the few will become, in the best sense, the property of the many, because administered for the common good."[65] Far better to trust a Maecenas or a Carnegie to provide amenities for the poor than to distribute the money among the people, where, Carnegie claimed, "it would have been wasted in the indulgence of appetite, some of it in excess, and it may be doubted whether even the part put to the best use, that of adding to the comforts of home, would have yielded results for the race . . . comparable to those flowing from the Cooper Institute."[66]

Workers, unsurprisingly, preferred a redistribution of wealth amongst those who labored. Addressing a rally against the acceptance of a Carnegie Library (endowed with a neoclassical façade), a Pittsburgh union leader asserted that he would "sooner enter a building built with the dirty silver Judas received for betraying Christ than enter the Carnegie Library."[67] In 1878, the *Atlantic Monthly* commented that workers regard "works of art and instruments of high culture, with all the possessions and surroundings of people of wealth and refinement, as causes and symbols of the laborer's poverty and degradation, and therefore as things to be hated."[68] Like Guglielmo Ferraro, James B. Weaver saw a similarity between America and Rome, but he ascribed a baser motive to philanthropy. Quoting Edward Gibbon's comments about Cleander, praetorian prefect and close advisor of the venal Emperor Commodus, he claimed that "Avarice was the main passion of his soul. . . . To divert the public envy, Cleander, under the emperor's name, erected baths, porticos, and places of exercise, for the use of the people."[69] Philanthropic gestures were seen by many American workers as a similar attempt to compensate for their economic exploitation by plutocrats.

In the prominent Populist Party leader Ignatius Donnelly's 1890 dystopian novel *Caesar's Column* (the very name suggests Rome), the tension between the oppressed proletariat in their tenements and the rich capitalists living in imperial splendor in private mansions and retreats simmers. While the "molten mass" of misery boils beneath the surface, the wealthy continue to indulge themselves, "as thoughtless of the impending catastrophe as were the people of Pompeii in those pleasant August days in 79."[70] The volcano finally erupts and explodes into violent civic unrest, just as Henry George (and the middling and upper classes) feared. The drunken victors haul the corpses of thousands of middle- and upper-class dead in chariots to New York City's Union Square, where they stack them into a colossal column, in Donnelly's words, "in commemoration of the death and burial of modern civilization."[71] Where Roman victory columns commemorated the defeat of the enemy with sculptural friezes of the vanquished, this fictional column is constructed out of the very bodies of the enemy classes.

Figure 4.4 "King Debs" blocking the "Highway of Trade"; cover of *Harper's Weekly* (July 14, 1894).

In reality, though, it was Americans who resisted the plutocratic regime who were demonized. Writing for the *Arena* magazine, one critic noted a parallel with Rome. The "new imperial aristocracy (the millionaires who have purchased political power and offices)," he wrote, "call anyone who denounces them an "anarchist, disturber, croaker . . . It was thus in the latter days of the Roman Republic."[72] According to Congregationalist clergyman Henry Ward Beecher, "laborer's unions are the worst form of despotism and tyranny in the history of Christendom!"[73] Critics of Eugene V. Debs, founder and president of the American Railway Union and a prominent labor leader, called him a dictator, a demagogue, and a despot – the same sorts of accusations that Roman senators hurled at Tiberius and Caius Gracchus – and an editorial in the *Chicago Tribune* accused Debs of establishing an *imperium in imperio* (sovereignty within sovereignty).[74] One cartoon in *Harper's Weekly* even has Debs wearing a crown (figure 4.4). In America as in Rome, "men of the people" were accused by their enemies of seeking a crown, of demagoguery, and of seeking to overturn the state. As Carl Smith has noted, these accusations turned attacks on plutocratic power back against its critics and justified repression in the name of liberty or political order.[75]

In 1894 Henry Demarest Lloyd gave a speech, which was widely circulated, entitled "Revolution, the evolution of socialism."[76] In it he cited Theodor Mommsen, "the great historian of Rome," whose "continual refrain is that its

[Rome's] liberties and prosperity were lost because its reformers were only half reformers, and none of its statesmen would strike at the root of its evils. By that mistake," wrote Lloyd, "we must profit."[77] The time for reforms was past. The careers of Tiberius and Caius Gracchus were no longer exemplary. "Our attempts at control, regulation, are but the agitations of the Gracchi, evidencing the wrong, but not rising to the cure."[78] Lloyd called for "political funerals" for the Republican and Democratic Parties and urged a "counter revolution" of the people against monopolies and corporations.[79] Noting the extreme class division of the times, Reverend William H. Carwardine, a pastor who had ministered to strikers during the Pullman Strike in 1894, warned that "we as a nation are dividing ourselves, like ancient Rome, into two classes, the rich and the poor, the oppressor and the oppressed."[80] Populists, looking ahead toward the elections of 1896, agreed: "There will be but two parties – the people against the plutocrats."[81] The lines were drawn. Class war seemed imminent.

The tensions of the 1890s struck contemporaries as being epochal in nature, and certainly resulted in highly contentious and contested elections. Recognizing the pressing importance of the upcoming 1892 elections, James B. Weaver wrote: "It will require another revolution to overthrow them. That revolution is upon us even now."[82] Weaver, Lloyd, and many others hoped for an alliance between labor movements, socialists, and the largely middle-class followers of Henry George's single tax platform under the banner of the Populist Party. But George was opposed to socialism and did not give his support to the Populists in the 1892 election, which earned him the name of "spoiler" of the People's Party's chances for electoral success.[83] While the Populists did take several states in the West, garnering 8.5 percent of the national vote, the South remained Democratic and the industrial Northeast turned out for the democratic presidential candidate Grover Cleveland as well, giving him a victory and the Democrats control of both houses of Congress.

The 1896 presidential election was widely seen as an electoral Armageddon. The sympathies of rich and middle-class Americans took the side of capital and poured money into Republican William McKinley's campaign. The middle class was more worried by militant unionism, political radicalism, and uncontrollable "alien" immigrants than by rich monopolists and unchecked capitalism. Artist Frederic Remington referred to the immigrant workers of Chicago as "the malodorous crowd of anarchist foreign trash" – an American equivalent of *plebs sordida* (the dirty masses), a term used by Cicero and other Romans about the urban poor in Rome.[84] The Populist Party's attempt at forging a coalition strong enough to defeat entrenched interests was a failure. In 1896 Republican William McKinley defeated William Jennings Bryan in the presidential election, a victory for capitalist-controlled cities and industries.

Marxist Daniel De Leon was undaunted by the election results. De Leon, a socialist writer, orator, and political organizer, remained an uncompromising social revolutionary until the end of his life. He had joined the Socialist Labor

Party (SLP) in 1890 and soon became editor of the SLP newspaper and a nationwide public speaker. In 1905 he was co-founder of the Industrial Workers of the World. The SLP had limited appeal to American workers, but socialists, like other reformers and radicals, felt compelled to invoke the Romans. De Leon knew the classics – he had attended a German high school and studied at the University of Leiden, where he mastered Greek and Latin – and he found much in Roman history that was relevant to the class struggle in America.[85] In 1902, De Leon gave two influential lectures on Roman history in New York City, which were later published together as *Two Pages from Roman History*.[86] In them, De Leon extracts lessons from Roman history for the socialist labor movement.

In contrast to reformers who admired the Gracchi brothers, De Leon saw Tiberius and Caius Gracchus as failed reformers whose mistakes should be studied and avoided – they should serve as "warnings across the ages to the Socialist."[87] De Leon dismissed Tiberius Gracchus' Agrarian Law as "a compromise with usurpation" and criticized him for not going further.[88] "The revolutionist who seeks the cloak of legality," he asserted, "is a revolutionist spent. He is a boy playing at soldier."[89] Socialists should learn from the "tactical blunders" of the Gracchi:

> And we then, in this country, the country that nearest [sic] comes to Rome since Rome went down – well may we look back to the lessons of those days. Well may we take to heart the career of the plebs' leaders; well may we take to heart the tactical blunders of the Gracchi, and from the one and the other receive a warning for our conduct in this generation.[90]

The Roman landlord plutocracy of the present day, De Leon argued, was the capitalist class. Democrats and Republicans were partners in oppression and there must be no alliances with them.[91] De Leon also rejected the Knights of Labor, Henry George's single tax movement, and Populism as inadequate. Revolution, not reform, was necessary. Workers must strive to "re-conjure up the spirit of '76."[92]

One of the American labor leaders who aroused De Leon's ire was the former socialist Samuel Gompers, who led the American Federation of Labor (AFL). The AFL frankly accepted class divisions and the wage labor system, and Gompers urged labor to distance itself from movements to overthrow capitalism. It was better, Gompers thought, to concentrate on seeking good wages and working conditions and security of employment. He therefore opposed any revolutionary programs socialists tried to promote at annual meetings. American unionism chose high wages and short hours within a capitalist society rather than revolution. De Leon split with the AFL over their rejection of political action and the SLP dream of economic autonomy. The end result of such compromises, De Leon thought, was that the masses were caught in a "warped class struggle"; the modern labor leader, he argued, actually buttressed capitalism.[93] What was needed, he concluded, was not compromise but radical political change to establish the cooperative commonwealth, or socialist republic.

Mark Hanna, a leading Republican industrialist and campaign manager of McKinley's successful bid for the presidency, was another target of De Leon's polemic. Hanna was one of the founders of the National Civic Federation Commission of Industrial Peace formed in 1900, whose purpose was to unite capital, labor, and the public in an effort to quell labor unrest. The commission's attempts aroused De Leon's scathing criticism in the form of a scornful analogy to Roman history. De Leon noted that after the passage of the Licinian Law in 367 BCE, Marcus Furius Camillus, one of the law's patrician supporters, built a temple at the foot of the Capitoline Hill in Rome and dedicated it to the goddess of Concord to symbolize that the long, bitter strife between the classes was now over. Harmony would replace animosity between plebeians and patricians. De Leon compared Camillus' temple to the National Civic Federation Commission of Industrial Peace and he called Camillus "the Mark Hanna of the Rome of the day."[94] Hanna's version of Camillus' temple contained, De Leon noted acerbically, a number of labor leaders, including Samuel Gompers, each of whom, without exception, "prates of harmony between employer and employee; in other words, each of whom upholds the capitalist system of society."[95] De Leon condemned trade union bureaucrats who collaborated with capitalism. In his view, the modern plebs leaders, like ancient plebs leaders, were motivated less by a desire to improve the lot of the proletarian plebs than to share for themselves the "exclusive, aristocratic, political privileges" of the wealthy elites.

Neither the SLP nor the Socialist Party became a major force in American politics, though the Socialist Party, formed in 1901, was more successful than the SLP. Its perennial presidential candidate was Eugene V. Debs, the labor organizer who had led the Pullman Strike in 1894. In 1912, the Socialist Party's best year, Debs received 6 percent of the total vote in the presidential election and 1,200 socialists won various state and local offices. Daniel De Leon frequently (and unsuccessfully) ran for office on the SLP ticket.[96] Despite the repeated victories of the Republicans in the state and national elections, De Leon soldiered on, tirelessly campaigning for the SLP until his death in 1914. However, with the single exception of the presidency of Woodrow Wilson, Republicans would control the White House until 1933. Industrial capital had definitively triumphed over labor, populism, and socialism.

A Dinosaur in a Darwinian age

Henry Adams, the great-grandson of John Adams and an observer and chronicler of this turbulent period, was struck by the similarities between Rome and increasingly imperial America. Writing c.1903, he recalled how in 1860 he had sat on the steps of the Capitoline Hill in Rome where Gibbon had conceived the idea of his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, "curiously wondering that not an inch had been gained by Gibbon – or all historians since – towards explaining

the Fall." The fall of Rome mattered to him because he viewed it as predictive of the American future: "Substitute the word America for the word Rome, and the question became personal. Rome was actual; it was England; it was going to be America."[97]

What Adams called the "force" – "the great mechanical energies of coal, iron, and steam" – had defeated the old republic – agriculture, handwork and learning (238). The "old Ciceronian idea of government by THE BEST" that had produced the long line of statesmen to which the Adams family belonged was gone (32). Once upon a time in old Rome and in the early days of the American republic "moral law was the sure guide for politics" and in America "senators were a species – they were Romans" (45). Industrial capitalism changed all that. The world after the Civil War had become "a bankers' world" (247) and as that happened "moral law had expired – like the Constitution" (280). Adams believed his position against the repeal of the Silver Act in 1893 was his last chance of standing up for his "eighteenth-century principles" (325). Populists wanted higher inflation through an increased coinage of silver, which would benefit Southern and Western farmers who were deeply in debt. Eastern bankers and businesses supported "hard" money – a single gold standard – and Congress repealed the Silver Act. Adams viewed this as a decisive turning point for the republic in favor of capitalism:

> On the evening of the final vote . . . Adams felt light in mind . . . He had said it was hopeless twenty years before, but he had kept on, in the same old attitude, by habit and taste, until he found himself altogether alone. He had hugged his antiquated dislike of bankers and capitalistic society until he had become little better than a crank. He had known for years that he must accept the regime, but he had known a great many other disagreeable certainties – like age, senility, and death – against which one made what little resistance one could. The matter was settled at last by the people. For a hundred years, between 1793 and 1893, the American people had hesitated, vacillated, swayed forward and back, between two forces, one simply industrial, the other capitalistic, centralizing, and mechanical. In 1893, the issue came on the single gold standard, and the majority at last declared itself, once for all, in favor of the capitalistic system with its necessary machinery. (343–4)

Adams knew he was a dinosaur, "not fit" for the new times. The country, in his view, had embraced a system that not only "ruthlessly stamped out the life of the class into which he was born," but also "tore society to pieces and trampled it under foot" (500). The defeat of the Populists in 1892 and William Jennings Bryan in 1896 put the running of the country beyond American workers and farmers, or as Adams put it beyond "Southern and Western farmers [and] city day-laborers" (344).

As he wrote at the start of the twentieth century about that day some forty-plus years earlier, when he had sat on the steps of the Capitoline Hill, Adams acknowledged the triumph of urban industrial capitalism and the emergence of

the new financial order in the United States since the Civil War. "In forty years America had made so vast a stride to empire that the world of 1860 stood already on a distant horizon somewhere on the same plane with the republic of Brutus and Cato, while schoolboys read of Abraham Lincoln as they did of Julius Caesar" (367). As he looked out of a window in New York "on the turmoil of Fifth Avenue [he] felt himself in Rome, under Diocletian, witnessing the anarchy, conscious of the compulsion, eager for the solution, but unable to conceive whence the next impulse was to come or how it was to act" (499–500).[98] But Adams knew his anxieties were antiquated and out of step with the times. Warnings of the fall of Rome had gone unheeded. The movements that sought to challenge the forces of monopolies, imperialism, and the new economic order – the labor movements, socialism, populism – had failed to impress the majority of the American population. The battle for the republic was over: the United States was now fully launched on its imperial trajectory.

Notes

1 Wilentz (1989), 130.
2 "The First of May. The Anniversary of the Labor Movement. The History of the Development of the Labor Movement in Chicago," *Vorbote* (May 4 and 18, 1887), in Keil and Jentz (1988), 231.
3 Lause (2001), 35–6.
4 Weaver (1892), 284.
5 Whitman (1996), 961.
6 The anti-Tammany campaign waged by Nast and *Harper's Weekly* and by the *New York Times* damaged the Democratic machine. Nast's cartoon for the cover of the November 25, 1871, *Harper's Weekly*, *What Are You Laughing At? To the Victor Belong the Spoils*, shows Tweed, as a wounded gladiator, in charge of a collapsing organization.
7 In 1880, however, both Sherman and Blaine would lose the Republican presidential nomination to Congressman James Garfield of Ohio.
8 Thomas (1983), 4–5. My discussion of Lloyd and Henry George and their interest in the fate of Rome owes much to Thomas. Lloyd combined Fabian socialism and Christian humanism. He never joined the Socialist Party.
9 Lloyd quoted in Thomas (1983), 79.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., 79–80.
12 Lloyd (1894), 2.
13 Ibid., 500.
14 Tacitus, *Agricola* 30. Trans. A. J. Church and W. J. Brodribb, http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/tacitus-agricola.html.
15 Lloyd (1894), 510.
16 Lloyd quoted in Thomas (1983), 79.
17 Trachtenberg (1982), 53.
18 Ibid., 89.

19 O'Hare (1908), 4–5.
20 On May 16, 1918, an amendment to the Espionage Act, often referred to as the Sedition Act, was added. The Sedition Act outlawed speaking, writing, or publishing anything that was intended to cause scorn or contempt of the government, the Constitution, the flag, or the military, or any language that promoted resistance to the United States.
21 O'Hare (1923), 19. O'Hare continued to compare her prison experience to Roman slavery and to American chattel slavery after her release from prison. "I became a slave – a slave as much as the Negroes once were slaves. In 13 months I have gone back 2,000 years and lived the life of a Roman slave . . . My government, my country . . . sold me as a slave to a prison contractor." "Brooklyn hails Kate O'Hare at two big rallies," *New York Call* (June 18, 1920): 1. The prison in Jefferson City, Missouri, like other prisons across the country, "sold" its convicts on the "auction block" to contractors of convict labor. O'Hare (1921), 13. See also her description of prison life in Kate Richards O'Hare's letter to "Sweethearts," September 14, 1919, in O'Hare and O'Hare (1919–21), 18–19.
22 Thanks to David Montgomery for drawing my attention to Ward. Ward finished the first of two volumes in 1887. Unable to find a publisher, he set up a print shop in his own house. The socialist publishing house Charles H. Kerr & Company published it in 1888. For biographical details, see "Cyrenus Osborne Ward," *Dictionary of American Biography Base Set*, American Council of Learned Societies, 1928–36; and Buhle (1987), 65–7.
23 C. O. Ward (1876), part 2, 74.
24 C. O. Ward (1876), part 5, 97.
25 C. O. Ward (1907), vol. 1, 284.
26 C. O. Ward (1876), part 5, 97.
27 C. O. Ward (1876), part 4, 90.
28 They were made up "of hard-working people of the so-called lower classes, with an object, spiritual and practical, of helping each other by mutual contributions, company, labor, and religion." C. O. Ward (1876), part 5, 98.
29 Ibid., part 5, 97.
30 C. O. Ward (1907), vol. 1, 282.
31 Ibid., 550.
32 Ibid., 553.
33 Bailie (1902), 630.
34 C. O. Ward (1876), part 5, 98.
35 C. O. Ward (1907), vol. 1, 557.
36 Buhle (1987), 65–6.
37 George quoted in McMath (1993), 112. George finished *Progress and Poverty* in the spring of 1879: "And when I had finished the last page in the dead of the night, when I was entirely alone, I flung myself on my knees and wept like a child. The rest was in the Master's hands." George quoted in Thomas (1983), 129–30.
38 George quoted in Thomas (1983), 229. And in America "everywhere it is evident that the tendency to inequality, which is the necessary result of material progress where land is monopolized, cannot go much further without carrying our civilization downward." George (1906), vol. 1, 538–9.
39 Ibid., 370–1.

40 George (1871), 46–7, quoted in Thomas (1983), 4.
41 In 1886, the *North American Review* appointed a special commissioner, Thomas P. Gill, to investigate land monopoly or "landlordism" in America. Gill's assessment builds on Henry George's warnings and analysis. Gill reported that a deadly disease was poisoning the body politic – agrarian disease – and it was the same disease that poisoned Rome. "*Latifundia* [great estates or plantations], says Pliny, killed Italy," wrote Gill. "Why should it not kill America too, if the remedies be not applied in time?" Like Romans, Americans have "squandered" the public domain. Corporations have seized "empires of the public land" through railroad grants. "Does America hope that the law of cause and effect will suspend itself for her benefit, or that the consequences which followed the mistakes of Rome will not follow like mistakes when committed by a republic of the nineteenth century?" We must, Gill wrote, "check the agrarian disease of land monopoly before it kills us as it poisoned Rome." Gill (1886), 52f.
42 George (1906), vol. 1, 534–5.
43 Ibid., 518–19.
44 George (1911), 124. Genseric, king of the Vandals from 428 to 477, was a key figure in the troubles of the western Roman Empire in the fifth century – among other acts harmful to Rome, he and his men sacked the city in 455. It is instructive to note that Henry George had no need to gloss Genseric for his readers.
45 Austin quoted in Hart (1950), 175.
46 Thomas (1983), 50.
47 T. E. Watson (1892), 2.
48 Ibid., 3.
49 Ibid., 207–8.
50 Bryan (1900), 724; 753.
51 Donnelly's speech quoted in McMath (1993), 162–3.
52 T. E. Watson (1892), 12.
53 Ibid., 13.
54 McMath (1993), 168; 51–2.
55 Weaver (1892), 271–2. And, "Rome in her highest glory was simple in habit, and generous in her laws. Equality of fortune and generous distribution of land was the law of common consent and the legal enactment of the state also . . . At one time, under this generous system of laws, 85% of her people had title in land. Then her legions were heroes unconquerable, and Rome was founded on the rock of equality and justice. . . . [Then the] land owners had been reduced from 85% to less than 1%. Kind reader, history is repeating itself in our own fair land. Monopoly is eating out the very vitals of our existence. Usury and extortion have fastened their iron jaws upon every industry of the land. Labor is burdened beyond endurance. . . ." W. S. Morgan (1891), 680–1.
56 According to the Census of 1890, out of 12 million families, 11 million lived on incomes of below 1,200 dollars a year. The average income of this group was 380 dollars. In the population as a whole, the richest 1 percent earned more than the total income of the poorest 50 percent, and had more wealth than the remaining 99 percent. Trachtenberg (1982), 99.
57 Weaver (1892), 365.
58 Martin (1911), 36.
59 Ibid., 246–7. Martin had probably read Gibbon's account of Heliogabalus. "A capricious prodigality supplied the want of taste and elegance; and whilst Elagabalus

lavished away the treasures of his people in the wildest extravagance, his own voice and that of his flatterers applauded a spirit and magnificence unknown to the tameness of his predecessors. To confound the order of seasons and climates, to sport with the passions and prejudices of his subjects, and to subvert every law of nature and decency, were in the number of his most delicious amusements. A long train of concubines, and a rapid succession of wives, among whom was a Vestal Virgin, ravished by force from her sacred asylum, were insufficient to satisfy the impotence of his passions. The master of the Roman world affected to copy the dress and manners of the female sex, preferred the distaff to the sceptre, and dishonoured the principal dignities of the empire by distributing them among his numerous lovers; one of whom was publicly invested with the title and authority of the emperor's, or, as he more properly styled himself, of the empress's husband." Gibbon's description of the Emperor Elagabalus, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 1, ch. 6, Project Gutenberg, http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/731.

60 "Under such circumstances, even in slave-holding nations, there has never lacked a tribune of the people. So sprung the Gracchi from the dust to lead the first great battle in Rome . . . So, in the fullness of time, came other greater men, a Marius, a Pitt, a Peel, who led the people onward and upward against the citadels of plutocracy." Martin (1911), 157–8.

61 Weaver (1892), 368.

62 Ferrero (1914), 26.

63 Ibid., 28. Ferrero recommended that Americans study their own culture to understand Rome's: "Many of you go to European universities to study ancient history. It seems to me that you might well invite many European professors to come and go through a finishing course in America, studying not only in libraries but in the live world and observing what happens in American society. Nobody is in a better position than you to understand ancient society" Ibid., 23. Here, United States history shapes Roman historiography.

64 Carnegie (1889), 653.

65 Ibid., 660.

66 Ibid., 660–1.

67 Union leader quoted in Uricchio and Pearson (1993), 24.

68 *Atlantic Monthly* quoted in Harris (1970), 19. Harris comments there "As much as the caste barriers constructed by the rich were disliked, their attempts to cross over the line and compensate philanthropically for their economic aggressions seemed even more dangerous . . . institutions of culture could easily become agencies of oligarchy and aristocracy."

69 Weaver (1892), 276.

70 Donnelly (1890), 62; 70.

71 Donnelly quoted in Burrows and Wallace (1999), 1155–6.

72 Ridpath (1898), 355–6.

73 Beecher quoted by Josephson (1934), 364–5.

74 *Chicago Tribune* (June 30, 1894) quoted in C. Smith (1995), 241.

75 These accusations functioned to "turn the union's attacks on the plutocratic power of Pullman and railroad barons back against labor leaders, justifying in the name of liberty, democracy, and freedom the repression of Debs and his cause." C. Smith (1995), 241.

76 Lloyd's speech at Central Music Hall in Chicago on October 6, 1894, was widely circulated in Populist circles. It is published in Destler (1946, rpt. 1963), 212–21.
77 Lloyd in Destler (1946, rpt. 1963), 219–20.
78 Lloyd (1894), 524.
79 Lloyd in Destler (1946, rpt. 1963), 216–19.
80 Carwardine (1894), 121. For the Pullman Strike, see McMath (1993), 188–9.
81 Wiebe (1967), 71.
82 Weaver (1892), 362.
83 J. L. Thomas (1983), 310.
84 Remington quoted in C. Smith (1995), 259–60.
85 On Daniel De Leon, see Coleman (1990).
86 "Plebs leaders and labor leaders" and "The warning of the Gracchi" were delivered at the Manhattan Lyceum, New York City, on April 2 and 16, 1902.
87 De Leon (1988), 70.
88 Ibid., 78; 78–9.
89 Ibid., 86.
90 Ibid., 103–4.
91 Ibid., 92.
92 "Reform or revolution," speech given on January 26, 1896, at Wells Memorial Hall, Boston. De Leon (1909).
93 De Leon (1988), 34
94 Ibid., 58–9.
95 Ibid. And, "The modern labor leader is to modern capitalism what the plebs leader was to the patricians . . . The temple that Camillus raised to the goddess of Concord did accordingly commemorate a truth . . . and that temple, though a monument cast in antique mold, throws out no faint suggestion of the meaning, at least the aspiration, of Hanna's modern monument of guile – the Industrial Peace Commission, on which capitalists and labor leaders are seen in fraternal peace and concord." Ibid., 35.
96 The SLP vote in presidential elections increased from 21,163 in 1892 to 29,374 in 1912; a percentage increase of 0.02 of the total votes cast. De Leon in 1891 and 1892 ran unsuccessfully as governor of New York state. In 1896 he was the SLP candidate for Congress in the 9th Congressional District of Manhattan and polled 4,300 votes; he frequently stood for the 16th Assembly District of Manhattan in the New York City municipal elections. Coleman (1990), 151.
97 H. Adams (1918), 91–2. Further quotations will be cited parenthetically in the text.
98 At just about the same time, President J. G. Shurman of Cornell University gave an address at the People's Institute at Cooper Union in New York City: "How the Republic of Rome became an empire." In it he made explicit comparisons between Rome and America. He warned about the "triumph of war power" in both and suggested that "the trust system in the United States was analogous to the system which caused the downfall of Rome." "Schurman sees danger in the military spirit," *New York Times* (November 21, 1904): 5.

5

Manifest Virtue

Nineteenth-century historical novels set in Rome offered a further way of imagining America's relationship to ancient Rome. Over the course of the century the view that America was exceptional, that it could embrace wealth and empire whilst indefinitely or permanently avoiding Rome's imperial decline, was increasingly linked to America's embracement of democracy and evangelical Christianity. Invocations of Republican Romans as exemplars of commendable moral and civic behavior began to decline and were replaced – in popular fiction – by Romans as decadent, heathen, and cruel conquerors and oppressors.[1]

Two of the most popular novels of the century were religious romances set in Rome in the early Christian era: English author Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834) and Lew Wallace's *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ* (1880). Bulwer-Lytton's novel's combination of bloated and corrupt Romans, idealized Greeks, and pious Christians appealed to antebellum Americans who were turning away from Republican Rome as a source of exemplary moral and political virtue toward a romanticized Greece, the birthplace of democracy and the source of a timeless beauty and art. The novel also functioned to dramatize contradictions and debates within America over the morally and politically charged pleasures of empire and wealth. In Lew Wallace's novel *Ben-Hur*, the conflicts between Romans, Jews, and Christians provided a metaphorical narrative from the Roman world of the New Testament for articulating and assuaging the anxieties of America's middle classes after the Civil War, an era of tumultuous social and economic change, matched by political unrest and a growing fissure between science and religion.

The City of the Dead

By the late eighteenth century, visits to Pompeii and Herculaneum were attractions for Americans on the Grand Tour. The ruins revealed ordinary daily life abruptly

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ended by disaster, inspiring melancholic meditations in Pompeii's visitors. Early antiquarian publications on the excavations, such as *Pompeiana: The Topography, Edifices and Ornaments of Pompeii* by Sir William Gell and John Gandy (1817–32) enabled many curious Americans, unable to go on the Grand Tour, to gaze at detailed – and idealized – engravings of restored interiors of Pompeian houses. The ongoing excavations of the "City of the Dead" (as Sir Walter Scott famously called Pompeii) were prominently featured in the nation's newspapers and magazines.[2] Visitors, such as Mark Twain, found wide audiences for their descriptions of the evocative remains of ordinary lives suddenly interrupted by death. "I saw," Twain wrote,

> the skeletons of a man, a woman, and two young girls. The woman had her hands spread wide apart, as if in mortal terror, and I imagined I could still trace upon her shapeless face something of the expression of wild despair that distorted it when the heavens rained fire in these streets, so many ages ago . . . One of them, a woman, still wore upon her skeleton throat a necklace, with her name engraved upon it – JULIE DI DIOMEDE.[3]

Such moving sights begged for a narrative. In 1834, Edward Bulwer-Lytton breathed life into the skeletons, villas, theaters, and temples he had seen on his visit to Pompeii. In the preface to his novel, he tells his readers what had moved him to compose it:

> It was not unnatural, perhaps, that a writer who had before labored, however unworthily, in the arts to revive and to create, should feel a keen desire to people once more those deserted streets, to repair those graceful ruins, to reanimate the bones which were not yet spared to his survey, to traverse the gulf of eighteen centuries, and to wake to a second existence – the City of the Dead![4]

His historical novel achieved his desire to reanimate Pompeii. Others attempted to do the same, but it was Bulwer-Lytton's combination of archaeological detail and melodramatic narrative that captured the popular imagination. He set his fictional characters in houses and buildings catalogued by archaeologists and antiquarians, relying heavily on the detailed *Pompeiana* of Gell and Gandy. Popular on both sides of the Atlantic, the novel was widely read and, as we have seen, Louisa Medina promptly and successfully adapted it for the stage at the Bowery Theatre in New York. Over the course of the nineteenth century, in addition to theatrical performances, the novel inspired paintings, an opera, and even pyro-dramas.[5] Bulwer-Lytton's imagined city became the lens through which generations of Europeans and Americans would see and make sense of the ruins of Pompeii. Indeed, many tourists who had read the novel and then visited Pompeii asked guides to show them the houses of Bulwer-Lytton's characters.

The story is structured around two oppositions: pagans versus Christians and a noble, oppressed Greece versus a decadent, imperial Rome. Pompeii stands in for the Roman Empire; "Pompeii," Bulwer-Lytton told his readers early on in his

novel, "was the miniature of the civilization of that age . . . a model of the whole empire" (9). The plot focuses on a romance between two Athenians living in the opulent city of Pompeii: Ione, a chaste, spiritually inclined, and beautiful young woman, and Glaucus, a wealthy young man wasting his life in dissipation. Ione awakens Glaucus' finer sensibilities and he falls in love. She reciprocates but the evil Egyptian priest of the cult of Isis, Arbaces, who is in love with Ione, conspires to thwart their love. Arbaces murders Ione's brother, who is a Christian, and contrives to have Glaucus accused of the crime, with the result that Glaucus is sentenced to fight in the arena for the entertainment of the citizens of Pompeii. While Glaucus is in the arena, Vesuvius erupts, and chaos ensues. The blind flower-seller, Nydia, who is in love with her patron, Glaucus, leads Glaucus and Ione to a boat and safety. The ending of the novel finds Ione and Glaucus, married and now converts to Christianity, living happily in Athens.[6]

The Appeal of the Apocalypse

Edward Bulwer-Lytton's subject, the last days of the decadent city of Pompeii and the escape of (proto-)Christian Athenians from the doomed city, struck a chord with American hopes and fears during the Second Great Awakening, an era characterized by guilt over an increasing materialism and ascending consumerism and by anxiety over the social dislocation that had come about in the wake of territorial and commercial expansion. How, many wondered, could wealth not lead to luxury and corruption? While political oratory and the press might present American expansionism and America's increasing wealth as positive, there was also a widespread anxiety that cut across class lines.[7] Were America's new power and wealth worth the moral cost?

In response to unsettling change and moral uprootedness, many Americans turned to religion. The explosion of religiosity and millennial fervor that fueled the Second Great Awakening from the late 1820s to the 1840s testifies to the tensions and concerns of Americans living in a period of rapid – and anxiety-provoking – social and economic change. It encompassed both farmers and factory workers to the extent that by the 1840s as many as eight in ten people regularly attended church. The result of this upsurge of piety, Sean Wilentz points out, was dramatic: "what was, in 1787, a nation of nominal Christians – its public culture shaped more by Enlightenment rationalism than Protestant piety – had turned, by the mid-1840s, into the most devoted evangelical Protestant nation on earth."[8]

What was the flavor of this new religiosity? Evangelical Protestants preached that regeneration of the self and salvation of the soul depended on inner faith. This displaced the earlier colonial Puritan and Calvinist emphasis on predestination or the necessity of grace for salvation. Now the matter of salvation was largely in the hearts and minds of individual believers. Thus, at the same time that the nation embraced democracy, salvation was also democratized.[9] On an individual

level, there was a concern with sin, hellfire, and redemption and a desire for an experiential knowledge of the Christian God.

Collectively, there was a shared belief that a wrathful God punishes sinful nations and that God acts through the cataclysms of nature. Other corrupt nations had suffered destruction – Babylon, Nineveh, Sodom and Gomorrah – why should America be exempt from the anger of the omnipotent creator? Many employed apocalyptic language to describe the turbulence of the times. Some labor radicals used images of God's vengeance and impending catastrophe to warn employers to heed the needs and rights of workers. The frequent riots and rebellions of the working poor were described as simmering and likely to erupt into a cataclysmic upheaval. After a fire in New York, the ruins were compared to Pompeii after the eruption of Vesuvius.[10] Paintings, poems, plays, and novels of the time frequently feature images of wealthy and corrupt pagan empires punished by a wrathful God. Typically, artists and writers pictured the anger of God as a fiery volcano bursting forth to bury a degenerate civilization. Engravings of images of Babylon, Sodom and Gomorrah, Rome, and Carthage were popular in illustrated Bibles and gift books of the times.[11] In fact, this fascination with catastrophes and apocalyptic scenarios was widespread enough in the arts to be termed the "school of catastrophe."[12] The destruction of Pompeii was viewed as a dramatic example of God's intervention in history.

Bulwer-Lytton devoted considerable attention to communicating the experience of the inhabitants of Pompeii during that city's last terrifying hours:

> Suddenly, . . . the place became lighted with an intense and lurid glow. Bright and gigantic through the darkness, which closed around it like the walls of hell, the mountain shone – a pile of fire! Its summit seemed riven in two; or rather, above its surface there seemed to rise two monster shapes, each confronting each, as Demons contending for a World. . . . And through the stilled air was heard the rattling of the fragments of rock, hurling upon one another as they were borne down the fiery cataracts. (380)

This passage captures in words the vision of one of the most popular paintings of the "school of catastrophe": Karl Pavlovitch Briullov's sensational 1833 *The Last Day of Pompeii* (figure 5.1). Bulwer-Lytton claimed that the Briullov's painting's flaming colors, glowing molten lava, crashing statues and buildings, and scenes of pathos and horror inspired his prose description of the last hours of the doomed city.[13] He transforms the lava flow in his fictional Pompeii into a scene from hell, a scene that must have seemed to some of his American readers very like the terrifying hell of an evangelical's sermon with its red-hot burning punishment and the shrieking and wailing of doomed men, women, and children.

Mrs. Frances Trollope, who sailed for America in1827 and remained for three years, attended two religious revivals. In *Domestic Manners of the Americans* she described a sermon given by a preacher in a church in Cincinnati "crowded to suffocation."

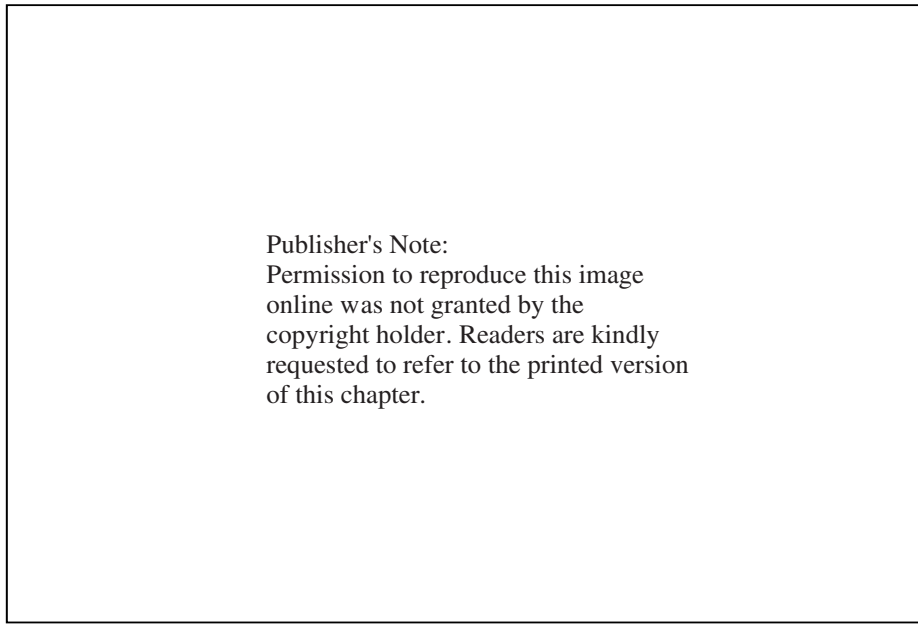
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Figure 5.1 Karl Pavlovitch Briullov, *The Last Day of Pompeii*, 1833. Oil on canvas. Russian State Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia. Photo Credit: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

> The preacher described, with ghastly minuteness, the last feeble fainting moments of human life, and then the gradual progress of decay after death, which he followed through every process up to the last loathsome stage of decomposition. Suddenly changing his tone, which had been that of sober accurate description, into the shrill voice of horror, he bent forward his head . . . [and described hell]. No image that fire, flame, brimstone, molten lead, or red-hot pincers could supply; with flesh, nerves, and sinews quivering under them, was omitted . . . "Come then!" he continued, stretching out his arms towards them, "come to us, and tell us so, and we will make you see Jesus, the dear gentle Jesus, who shall save you from it."[14]

At another revival the English visitor chronicled the response by the attendees to this sort of preaching:

> Hysterical sobbing, convulsive groans, shrieks and screams the most appalling, burst forth on all sides. I felt sick with horror . . . The scene described by Dante [in the *Inferno*] was before me.[15]

Mrs. Trollope's descriptions vividly convey the atmosphere of these revivals, with their dramatizing focus on the fire and brimstone and the torments awaiting sinners in hell and the imminent need for repentance and conversion of the heart.

Unlike the rest of the city's inhabitants, the Christians in Bulwer-Lytton's Pompeii are not terrified by Vesuvius' fiery eruption. They rejoice because they believe the cataclysmic destruction of the world is the prelude to the glorious Second Coming:

> A group of men and women, bearing torches, passed by the temple. They were of the congregation of the Nazarenes; and a sublime and unearthly emotion had not, indeed, quelled their awe, but it had robbed awe of fear . . . "Woe! Woe!" cried, in a shrill and piercing voice, the elder at their head. "Behold! the Lord descendeth to judgment! He maketh fire come down from heaven in the sight of men! Woe! woe! ye strong and mighty! Woe to ye of the fasces and the purple! Woe to the idolater and the worshipper of the beast!" (377–8)

Some antebellum evangelical sects similarly preached that the Second Coming and the Day of Judgment were imminent. The Millerites, for example, dramatically represent the period's widely shared belief in the approaching apocalypse. By 1843, over one million people had attended the Millerite religious camp meetings, and perhaps as many as one hundred thousand of these were persuaded by William Miller to bring their earthly affairs to an end. On the night of October 21, 1844, groups of men, women, and children wearing long white robes that they called their "ascension robes" gathered together on the tops of mountains, hills, or even trees to await the Second Coming of Christ and the final destruction of the world. Throughout the night the Millerites chanted and sang hymns as they waited for the coming catastrophe predicted for October 22, 1844.

Millenarian sects like the Millerites were on the fringes of the Second Great Awakening; most Protestants were not so radical. Yet Bulwer-Lytton's scenes of apocalyptic devastation as punishment for sin resonated with many middle-class Protestants who simultaneously enjoyed and felt guilty about material prosperity and the nation's march toward empire. They believed in a God who acts through the cataclysms of nature. One popular magazine exclaimed: "While the inhabitants of Pompeii were busied with the schemes of wealth and greatness – the irresistible flood of fire came roaring from the mountain and shrouded them in eternal night . . . Great God how sublime are thy works! How awful thy wrath!"[16] If the eruption of Vesuvius and the destruction of Pompeii were God's punishment for the immoral and decadent behavior of Romans, why, then, should America be exempt from his wrath? Many Americans believed that a national day of reckoning was at hand.

After Glaucus and Ione's escape from Pompeii to Athens, Glaucus wrote a letter to his Roman friend Sallust. Sallust wants him to visit Rome but Glaucus declines:

> I have forsworn the Imperial City, its might, tumult and hollow joys . . . You tell me you are sure I cannot enjoy life in these melancholy haunts of a fallen majesty. You dwell with rapture on the Roman splendours, and the luxuries of the imperial court. My Sallust – "*non sum qualis eram*" – I am not what I was! (387–8)[17]

Settled in Greece, with pagan Pompeii destroyed, Glaucus and Ione have converted to the new religion. They live a simple life in Athens, far from the fleshpots of Rome. Glaucus invites Sallust to visit and witness his new life:

> But come hither, and see what enjoyments, what hopes are ours – and *not* the splendour of imperial banquets, *nor* the shouts of the crowded circus, *nor* the noisy forum, *nor* the glittering theatre, *nor* the luxuriant gardens, *nor* the voluptuous baths of Rome – shall seem to thee to constitute a life of more vivid and uninterrupted happiness than that which thou so unreasonably pitiest as the career of Glaucus the Athenian! (390)

Of course, most of Bulwer-Lytton's novel dwelt on precisely these tantalizing details of Roman life in Pompeii. He described with meticulous detail the opulent villas, temples, baths, entertainments, clothing, furniture, jewelry, and food of the inhabitants of Pompeii. Protestant readers of the novel could have their cake and eat it too: they could vicariously enjoy Pompeiian luxury and wealth at the same time that they could displace the corruption that stemmed from them onto the decadent Romans. They could view themselves as the moral and spiritual descendants of the early Christians living under Roman rule and still take pleasure in reading about the voluptuous, luxury-loving, "idolatrous" Romans.

The Glory that was Greece

By the time Bulwer-Lytton's novel reached the shores of the United States, many Americans had become infatuated with Greek antiquity. As the nation embraced democracy under Andrew Jackson's presidency, Americans increasingly felt a special affinity with Greece as the cradle of democracy. Athenian democracy seemed the better political model for the populist supporters of Andrew Jackson than the "mixed" government of the Roman Republic. Aesthetically, Americans viewed Greek antiquity as the source of great cultural achievements, and Greek art and literature set the ideal standards of beauty and excellence by which later artistic endeavors were measured. "Modern excellence is to Grecian Art, what a Lowell factory is to the Parthenon," wrote one reviewer of Bulwer-Lytton's novel.[18] Ancient Greek culture provided Americans with an aesthetic and spiritual refuge from the crassness and materialism of the Jacksonian era.[19] Greek Revival architecture swept the country. Andrew Jackson's final resting place was in a Greek temple designed to hold his remains, rather than a Roman sarcophagus. In contrast to the tumult and rapid industrialism of American society in the antebellum era, Greek antiquity was idealized as the home of beauty and culture, of all that was noble and timeless. Americans increasingly associated Rome with a corrupting materialism and oppressive imperialism. Bulwer-Lytton's heroes are Athenians not Romans.

Greece, for Bulwer-Lytton, was the land of poetry, and he makes his hero, Glaucus, embody its aesthetic virtues. He introduces Glaucus as "of that slender and beautiful symmetry from which the sculptors of Athens drew their models; his Grecian origin betrayed itself in his light but clustering locks, and the perfect harmony of his features" (2). When Glaucus faces a cruel death in the arena, the author makes him the apotheosis of Greek male beauty. His body anointed, he enters the arena naked save for a cincture around his loins and a stylus for a weapon.

> He towered aloft to the full of his glorious stature. In the elastic beauty of his limbs and form, in his intent but unfrowning brow, in the high disdain, and in the indomitable soul . . . he seemed the very incarnation, vivid and corporeal, of the valour of his land – of the divinity of its worship – at once a hero and a god! (360–1)

Glaucus brings to life the Greek statue known as the *Apollo Belvedere*, the statue that made art historian Johann Winckelmann swoon (figure 5.2).[20] In contrast to Glaucus, Bulwer-Lytton's Romans are jaded, bloated, and soft.

Compared to the glories of Greek culture Roman culture was decidedly second-rate for Bulwer-Lytton: Romans had "plagiarized" and corrupted Greek culture. "Yes, but those Romans who mimic my Athenian ancestors do everything so heavily," sighed Glaucus. "Oh, my Clodius, how little your countrymen know of the true versatility of a Pericles, of the true witcheries of an Aspasia!" (6). Glaucus and Ione first meet at a temple to Minerva where each is offering tearful prayers to their beloved Athens, "the city on which Pallas smiles no longer;" the "iron men of Rome" have subjected her (11; 200). In Ione's eyes, Glaucus "was to her as the incarnation of her father's land;" and together, according to the author, their hearts concentrated "the last rays of the sun of Delos and of Greece" (99). Ten years after the destruction of Pompeii, Glaucus, now living in Athens, writes to his friend Sallust: "Am I happy, ask you? Oh, what can Rome give equal to what I possess at Athens? Here, everything awakens the soul and inspires the affections . . . in the streets I behold the hand of Phidias and the soul of Pericles" (389). His happiness is chilled only when he thinks of Athens' "impotence – [under] the crushing weight of the Roman yoke" (389).

Bulwer-Lytton's novel's elevation of Athens as the birthplace of democracy and home of true beauty and art came in the wake of the recent Greek War for Independence against Ottoman rule (1821–32), a struggle that had inspired some Americans to fight on the side of Greece. Sympathy for modern Greece ran high in Europe and in America, where money was solicited in cities in large public meetings convened to raise funds for the revolutionaries.[21] Across the nation Americans identified with the Greek fight against Ottoman tyranny, which was deemed analogous to their own rebellion against British oppression. Modern Greece, the home of the glories of classical Greek civilization and the battleground between liberty and tyranny, should be supported. Many of those enamored of Greece believed that once the Ottoman "yoke" was lifted, Periclean Athens, the font of art, culture, and democracy, would be reborn.

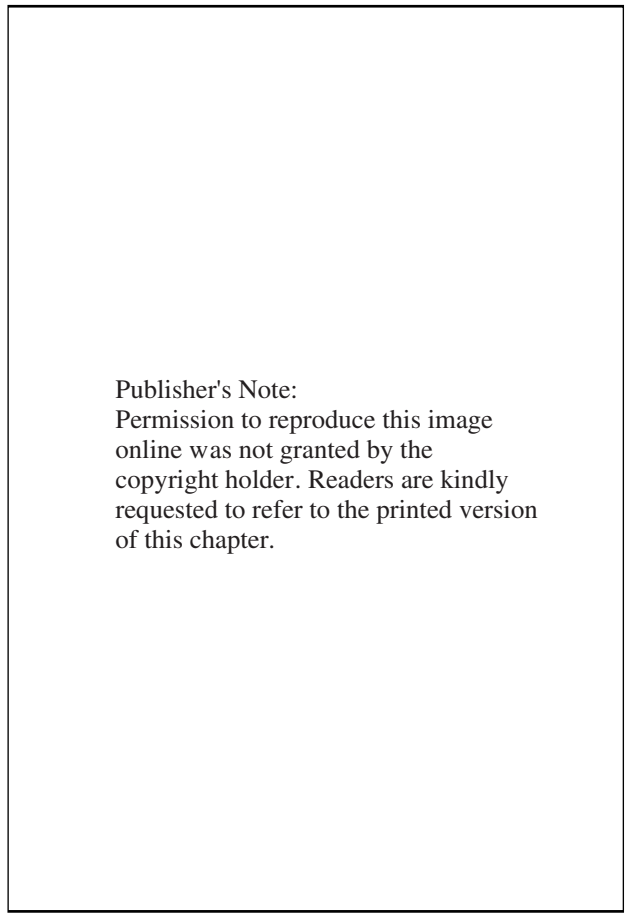
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Figure 5.2 *Apollo Belvedere*, second-century CE Roman copy of a Greek original by Leochares (c.350–320 BCE). Museo Pio Clementino, Vatican Museums, Vatican State. Photo Credit: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

Bulwer-Lytton's description of Roman imperialism resembled contemporary stereotypical images of the Ottoman Empire: ancient Romans, like the modern Ottomans, are parasites and pagans, and their imperialism promotes sloth and decadence. "Ambition in the regions of a despotic and luxurious court was but the contest of flattery and craft. Avarice had become the sole ambition – men desired praetorships and provinces only as the license to pillage and government was but the excuse of rapine" (97–8). Rome's iron hand stifled Glaucus' (and conquered Athens') innate nobility:

> The world was one vast prison, to which the Sovereign of Rome was the Imperial gaoler; and the very virtues which in the free days of Athens would have made him ambitious, in the slavery of earth made him inactive and supine. For in that unnatural and bloated civilization, all that was noble in emulation was forbidden. (97)

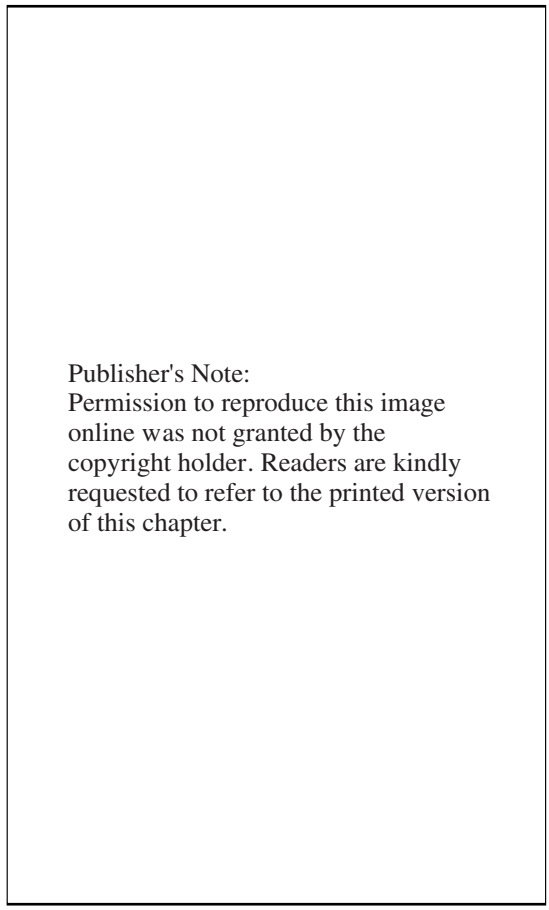
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Figure 5.3 Hiram Powers, *The Greek Slave*, carved after 1869. Photo Credit: Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC/Art Resource, NY.

Rome is personified as a sovereign jailor, enslaving and enervating her captives. In Bulwer-Lytton novel, imperial Rome oppressed Christianity and the glories of democratic Greece; in the nineteenth century, Greece – now Christian – needed to expel the oppressive Ottoman infidel in order to restore its former freedom and glory. The Romans of the past were the Ottomans of the present.

Hiram Powers's *The Greek Slave* (1844) was one of the most famous statues of the nineteenth century (figure 5.3). It portrays a nude Greek girl captured by the Turks and put on the auction block in a slave market.[22] Ottoman Turks have stripped off her clothes, put her in chains, and put her up for sale. The beautiful, chaste, young Greek maiden retains her purity and innocence despite her chains; the infidel Turk cannot defile her. Powers suggested in a pamphlet that accompanied the statue's American tour that her nakedness signified the purest form of the Ideal,

the triumph of Christian virtue over sin. "This sales pitch," commented art historian and critic Robert Hughes, "worked so well that American clergymen urged their congregations to go and see *The Greek Slave*."[23] The statue caused a sensation and its tour across the nation attracted thousands of spectators. Powers made no fewer than six copies of *The Greek Slave* statue during his life and it was reproduced in multiple copies in a scaled-down model in Parian ware.[24]

At the heart of Bulwer-Lytton's novel is the villain Arbaces, the Egyptian priest of Isis whose lust for power and for chaste Ione drive forward the action of the novel. Bulwer-Lytton's descriptions of Arbaces bear a marked similarity to stereotypical images of Muslims in general and Ottomans in particular. This should not surprise us; after all, Egypt had been a part of the Ottoman Empire since 1517, so a linkage between Egypt and the modern Ottomans was already in place. In America and in Europe, the Greek War for Independence was often seen as a reprise of earlier struggles against the "Islamic East," personified in the figure of the Ottoman Empire. The *Courier Français*, for example, proclaimed that "the barbarians of Genghis Khan and Tamerlane are revived in the nineteenth century. War to the death has been declared against European religion and civilization."[25] "It is a disgrace to all the Powers of Europe," thundered the English politician and abolitionist William Wilberforce, "that, long ere now, they have not made a simultaneous effort and driven back a nation of barbarians, the inveterate enemies of Christianity."[26] Ottoman sultans held the highest political title in Islam, a religion Americans and Europeans viewed as threatening, fraudulent, and perverted. Bulwer-Lytton puts Arbaces, as chief priest of Isis, at the top of the hierarchy of a religion the writer portrays as sinister and false. In keeping with deeply rooted western representations of Muhammad and Islam, Arbaces is cast as a calculating imposter who is "half prophet and half fiend."

Contemporary images of the Ottoman sultans portray them as sensual, cruel, and arrogant; so too Bulwer-Lytton's Arbaces:

> The Egyptians, from the earliest time, were devoted to the joys of sense. Arbaces inherited both their appetite for sensuality and the glow of imagination which struck light from its rottenness. But still, unsocial in his pleasures as in his graver pursuits, and brooking neither superior nor equal, he admitted few to his companionship, save the willing slaves of his profligacy. He was the solitary lord of a crowded harem. (126)

As Ottoman sultans (and Muhammad) were thought to do, Arbaces takes lascivious pleasure in his harem, over which he presides in solitary splendor. Arbaces' lust for the pure Ione is the same desire that moves the Turks who have enslaved Powers's young Greek maiden.[27] Arbaces also lusts for power: "My power can extend wherever man believes . . . the world itself furnishes the subjects of Arbaces"(30). He seeks dominion over the world. Like the Ottoman sultans, Arbaces wishes to be lord of the horizons.

Bulwer-Lytton's Whig sympathies indicate that he may well have intended his novel as a corrective warning to his own British aristocratic class of the potential corruption of modern European empires, including, of course, the British Empire.[28] Christianity is offered as the bracing tonic that will prevent moral decay and imperial decline. If Christianity were to infuse more deeply the hearts and minds of the British, Bulwer-Lytton implies, their empire might yet become a benevolent and righteous one. When moral values are observed, empire can flourish and avoid the corruption of the ancient Roman or modern Ottoman empires. These sentiments had relevance in America. Antebellum Protestant culture embraced a triumphal and progressive narrative of early Christian resistance to, and eventual victory over, pagan Rome. America was exceptional: America's combination of democracy and evangelical Christianity meant that the country could have wealth and empire and yet avoid Rome's cycle of imperial decline. This sentiment finds its fullest fictional expression in Lew Wallace's novel *Ben-Hur*.

The Ben-Hur Phenomenon

Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ was published in 1880 and has never been out of print. By 1884 it was leading Harper's best-seller list, and it soon replaced *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as the number one seller of the nineteenth century. In 1896, a nationwide survey revealed that *Ben-Hur* was circulated more than any other book in eight out of ten libraries.[29] By 1912, over a million copies of the novel had been sold, and in 1913, Sears, Roebuck and Company printed a further million copies to sell through its mail order catalogue at 39 cents each, ensuring that the novel reached even rural regions. Shortly after the novel's release, the Barnum and Bailey Circus featured a "Ben-Hur" chariot race; and in 1899 Lew Wallace agreed to a stage production of the novel (figures 5.4 and 5.5).[30] It premiered on November 29, 1899, in New York in front of a standing-room-only crowd. When the play ended its record-breaking 21-year run in 1920, it had been performed over six thousand times. A fraternal order and lodge crystallized around the novel in Wallace's home state of Indiana. By 1905, the Supreme Tribe of Ben-Hur had members in 26 states and its own publication, the *Chariot*. At the fraternal meetings there were picnics, socials, readings from the novel, performances, and stereopticon shows. Junior orders were established for boys and girls with uniforms, drum and bugle corps, and scouting activities. Ben-Hur societies developed elaborate rituals, and members dressed as characters from the novel. The phenomenal success of the novel and the stage production led to three popular cinematic adaptations in 1907, 1925, and 1959, ensuring that *Ben-Hur* has remained in the public consciousness until today.[31]

Although most critics and leading literary figures disliked the novel – Wallace's contemporaries Edith Wharton, Henry James, and W. D. Howells considered him a second-rate writer, and the *Atlantic Monthly* dismissed his novel as a "failure,

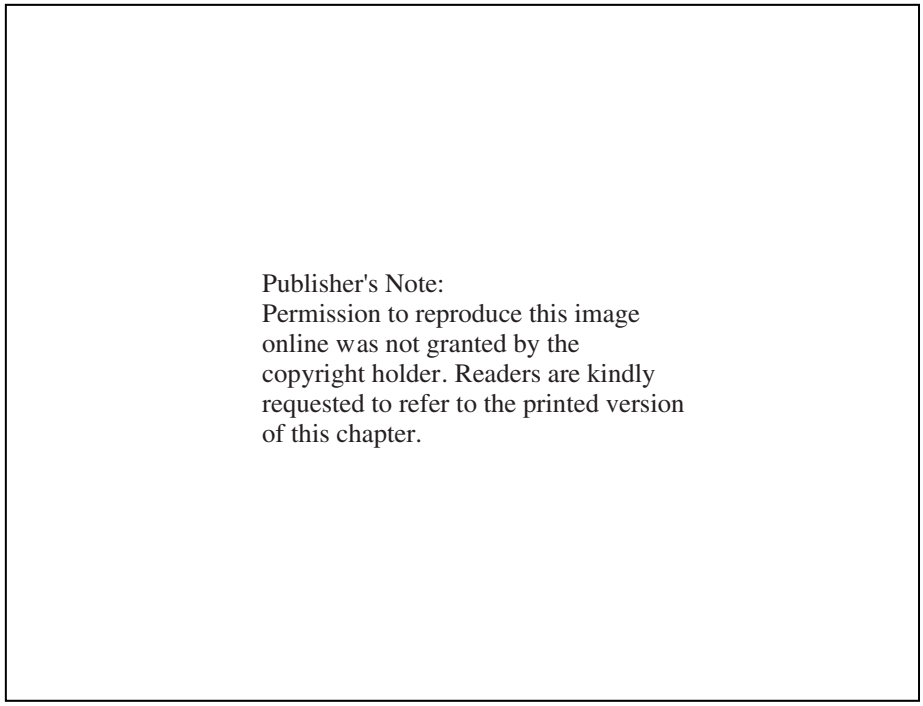
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Figure 5.4 Sells Brothers Circus poster advertising "Ben-Hur" chariot races, c.1880s. Courtesy of the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

artistically," reeking of dime-novel melodrama – the public loved it.[32] Readers wrote to Wallace to tell him that their lives had been transformed by the novel; some became missionaries after reading it, others claimed to have been reborn. "On the fifth day of July, 1885," one man wrote to Wallace, "I was a drunkard . . . bound to a bad end. . . . Everything was black and growing blacker [then] Sunday morning your book *Ben-Hur* came into my hands and I read it. It brought Christ home to me as nothing else could. . . . I stood up . . . and was a man."[33] President James A. Garfield could not put the novel down and stayed up all night to finish it. Impressed with Wallace's knowledge of the eastern Mediterranean world, he appointed him minister to the Ottoman Empire in 1881. When Wallace returned from Istanbul in 1884, he found himself in great demand as a lecturer and he crisscrossed the nation giving talks and readings. After Wallace died in 1905 the flag at the Indiana State capital flew at half mast for 30 days, and in 1910, a statue of him was placed in the Capitol Building in Washington; he is the only novelist ever to be given that honor.[34]

Wallace, raised in Indiana, loved the novels of Sir Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper, and grew up hearing his father, a lawyer and state governor,

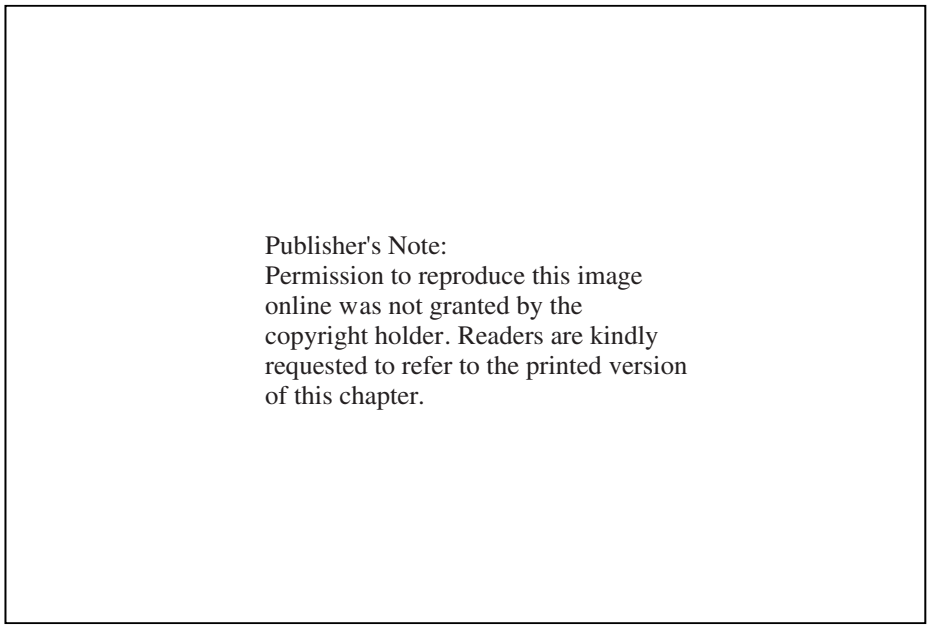
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Figure 5.5 Advertising poster for Klaw and Erlanger's stage production of *Ben-Hur*, c.1900. Courtesy of the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

read Shakespeare, Thucydides, and Macaulay aloud. Politically, he vacillated between the Republican and Democratic parties. As a young man he was a Whig, but briefly became a Democrat when Zachary Taylor was the Whig candidate, and later became a Republican after being impressed by Abraham Lincoln. He fought in the Mexican War and in the Civil War and was decorated as a general. Back in civilian life, he became a reluctant lawyer who never enjoyed practicing law, and then in 1878 he was made territorial governor of New Mexico. It was in the governor's palace in Santa Fe that Wallace penned the final words of *Ben-Hur*, nearly ten years after he had started writing the novel.

Ben-Hur offers its readers a powerful combination of religious uplift, adventure, and romance, as well as vivid and detailed descriptions of the multicultural Roman world of the time of Christ.[35] The story begins with a prologue dramatizing the nativity and the coming of the Magi, and then moves to Judaea where the hero, Judah Ben-Hur, a wealthy, noble, and pious Jew, is introduced. He is the blood brother of Messala, a Roman childhood friend, who has returned to Judaea as an ambitious soldier in the occupying Roman army. Messala tries to recruit his friend as an ally, but Ben-Hur refuses to inform on dissidents hostile to Rome. This provokes a quarrel, and the former friendship turns into bitter enmity; Messala leaves Ben-Hur saying, "Down Eros, up Mars." After an accident in which Ben-Hur's sister knocks loose tiles from the roof of the family house, causing the

Roman procurator to fall off his horse, Messala charges the family with attempting to assassinate the procurator. Ben-Hur's mother and sister are imprisoned and he is sent on a march across the desert to become a galley slave for life. During the march, when Ben-Hur is close to death from lack of water, a young carpenter defies the Romans and gives him water. It is Ben-Hur's first view of Christ.

Ben-Hur survives a brutal time as a galley slave until he manages to save the life of Quintus Arrius, the Roman commander of the ship, during a naval battle. In gratitude, Arrius frees him, adopts him as a son, and takes him to Rome, where he becomes a renowned charioteer. When his adopted father dies, Ben-Hur returns to Judaea in search of his family and Messala. He recovers his wealth but the search for his mother and sister proves fruitless, so he increasingly concentrates on his desire to exact revenge from Messala. Ben-Hur is torn romantically between the pious and good Esther, the daughter of Simonides, the guardian of the family's wealth, and the duplicitous Egyptian temptress, and mistress of Messala, Iras. Ben-Hur eventually exacts revenge on Messala when he defeats him in a chariot race, a race which Messala has bet his entire fortune on winning. Messala's chariot crashes, leaving him crippled for life – but not for long, as he is soon killed by Iras. At last, Ben-Hur locates his mother and sister, who are now lepers, and organizes an army to aid the prophet he thinks will help the Jews expel the Romans from Judaea. When Jesus is sentenced to be crucified, Ben-Hur offers to raise his army to free him. But he is told that Jesus of Nazareth is a spiritual not a temporal deliverer and his offer is refused. Jesus has, however, cured his mother and sister of leprosy and the reunited family witnesses the crucifixion. Ben-Hur becomes a Christian, and the novel ends with him married to Esther and spending his fortune to create the catacomb of San Calixto in Rome, which will serve as a refuge for Christians during later persecutions.

The Toga Western

In 1905, the year Wallace died, a reviewer for the *Nation* wrote that the novel's popularity could not be due to its verbose, melodramatic, and often wooden style: "A man who can thrill at such sentences," he commented, "can surely spend his hours happily and unconsciously while waiting for the gallows." The reviewer concluded that its appeal lay in the characters and action of the novel, which resemble those in a dime novel. "*Ben-Hur* gives us Crimson Dick, Old Sleuth, Jesse James, and the Queen of the Outlaws combined with the strongest religious influences," he wrote; "Jesse James is a divinity student in a white choker when compared with Messala."[36] One of the reasons for the novel's success was that it combined the conventions of the historical epic with the newly emerging genre of the Western.

As a genre, dime novels were cheap, oversized story pamphlets that began featuring Western heroes around 1860. Their early subjects were pioneer figures or

Revolutionary heroes; later, Civil War heroes, pirates, and trappers. After the Civil War, the focus turned to the Wild West and the majority of dime novels were set in frontier landscapes. In the 1870s, a new series emerged called half-dime novels. They were cheaper in quality, illustrated, could run to 3,000 words and cost 5 cents. The hundreds of dime novels in the last third of the nineteenth century established the scout, the cowboy, and the outlaw as American heroes. This was the popular pulp fiction of the age. Nevertheless, there was a veneer of pompousness to dime novels. They were "high-falutin'," trying to be literary rather than pulp. *Ben-Hur* was a crossover novel – like the dime novel, it offered in the words of one reviewer plenty of "battle, murder, and sudden death," but it was read by an educated, largely Protestant audience.[37] Through mixing religious pieties with excitement, romance, and adventure the novel broke the last remaining Protestant barriers to fiction.[38] To its most enthusiastic readers, the Protestant middle classes who had been "bred to regard novels as hell broth," its pages "were like cold water to a thirsty soul."[39]

The Southwestern United States helped shape Wallace's depiction of what Protestant Christians call the Holy Land.[40] As territorial governor of New Mexico from 1878 until 1881, Wallace had actual experience of the frontier and was involved in the turf battles in Lincoln County between the Mexican-Spanish and the immigrant white ranchers, who included in their ranks the hired gun Billy the Kid. Both factions were subject to attacks by the native Apaches. The mix of cultures in frontier New Mexico, its deserts and mountainous terrain, and the endemic violence amongst its inhabitants gave color, detail, and a sense of place to Wallace's portrayal of the landscapes and cultures of Roman Judaea and the eastern Mediterranean.[41]

Wallace had read James Fenimore Cooper, whose novels, beginning with *The Pioneers* in 1823, established the scout as a popular Western character and the frontier as an essential ingredient of the Western. Indeed, Wallace's novel has many of the characteristics of the Western.[42] In the novel, Roman Judaea is a frontier where the oppressive might of Rome clashed with the moral uprightness of its colonized Jewish inhabitants. The Romans are irreligious outsiders who reject the Jewish way of life and are military overlords who have mastered the tools of violence. Ben-Hur moves back and forth between Rome and Judaea. Like one of Cooper's scouts he can move in both worlds, and he uses his knowledge of Roman ways to plot a Jewish rebellion against Rome and to plan vengeance against his personal enemy, Messala. His ability to cross borders and boundaries is also reflected in his attraction to two very different women: Iras, the morally dangerous Egyptian temptress, and Esther, the modest and chaste Jew, just as in Westerns the pull is often between the hero's attraction to a saloon girl or prostitute and the schoolmarm.

Ben-Hur follows the "vengeance" plot, one of the basic Western plots.[43] The motive force for the action of the novel is Ben-Hur's desire for revenge against Messala and Rome. Despite the men's being blood brothers since youth, politics

and Rome's increasingly oppressive policies forces a break between the two. Messala opts for Roman power; Ben-Hur chooses family, religion, and the honor of his people, vowing not to rest until he has rescued his mother and sister from Roman captivity. This passion for vengeance fuels his actions, and his acquired knowledge of Roman chariot racing leads to his triumph over Messala. Here we see another convention of the Western at work. According to John Cawelti, "the situation must involve a hero who possesses some of the urge toward violence as well as the skills, heroism and personal honor ascribed to the wilderness way of life, and it must place this hero in a position where he becomes involved with or committed to the agents and values of civilization."[44] Ben-Hur's mastery of Roman chariot racing, which he admires from the beginning of the novel, enables his ultimate victory over his enemy. He then rejects Roman ways when he returns to his people and embraces Christianity, the religion that will ultimately triumph over the old pagan Roman world.

In Western after Western we find what Richard Slotkin has termed "regeneration through violence."[45] As men leave civilization and move to the liminal West they are challenged. The men who are good prove their goodness through acts of violence. All kinds of men, including outlaws, criminals, nobodies, and Eastern dandies, prove their worth through their ability to deal with stress on the frontier and can be redeemed through violent conflict.[46] The key moment in the Western is the struggle or contest between hero and villain, the showdown usually being a gunfight. In *Ben-Hur* it is the violent confrontation between Ben-Hur and Messala in the chariot race, a cathartic act of violence, that leaves Ben-Hur ready to embrace Christianity.

Like the mythological West, the mythological Roman arena offered a place where manhood could be tested and proved. Readers of *Ben-Hur* and audiences at its stage and film adaptations have especially loved the chariot race – in fact, the immensely popular stage adaptation had the chariot race as its focus; the short 1907 silent film consisted only of the chariot race; and the chariot races were the memorable climaxes of the epic films of 1925 and 1959. Like ritualized fights between gunslingers or between cowboys and Indians, the chariot race was performed by children and adults at play and in amateur theatre throughout the country, and was cheered at the theatre and at movies.

Even though the overriding theme of the novel is revenge rather than the turn-the-other-cheek practices of Jesus, the novel was recommended from the pulpits of many churches, and Sunday school lessons frequently included readings from it. "Nobody who went to Sunday school could have escaped the story if he tried," recalled one former Sunday school student.[47] Another Sunday school attendee recalled that whenever the class reached the life of Christ, a chapter from *Ben-Hur* was read and then followed with a talk praising the book's contents. "Now dear children," the talk always began, "I always warn you against novels. But there is one work of fiction drawn very largely from the Bible . . . the great bulk of the work is as true as the blessed gospel itself. I mean *Ben-Hur, a Tale of the Christ.*

I can recommend it strongly. . . . We have two copies in our own Sunday-school library."[48] Ben-Hur's conversion from violence and his progression from *lex talionis* (the law of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth) to the teachings of Christ mirrored the larger process whereby, in Christianity, the Old Testament is absorbed and superseded by the New Testament. The novel's ecumenical approval of Jews, Arabs, and at least one good Roman (Quintus Arrius) and its embracing of pacifism after violence may also reflect Wallace's response to his experience fighting in the American Civil War and his hope for reconciliation and peace between Americans. After hundreds of pages of "battle, murder, and sudden death," the novel ends with the laying down of weapons and moral redemption.

Archaeology, Science, and the Bible

According to a widely circulated anecdote, Lew Wallace's inspiration for his novel was a conversation he had with the noted agnostic Robert Ingersoll, whom he met while they were both on a railroad trip. Ingersoll was a brilliant orator, the author of numerous books, and in great demand as a lecturer. He loved to debate, and he asked Wallace whether he thought there was a God and whether he believed that Jesus was the Son of God. Wallace went away chagrined because he had been unable to reply to those challenging questions in depth and detail. He made up his mind to write a history of Christ and immersed himself in research. *Ben-Hur*, he later claimed, "was my reply to him."[49]

Lew Wallace spent years researching the period, including weeks at the Library of Congress. He studied geography in great detail, read Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, read or reread classical texts including Plutarch, Tacitus, Josephus, Pliny, and more, and read every secondary source and archaeological report he could get his hands on. He relied especially on William Smith's 1848 *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, designed to assist scholars in their understanding of the ancient world.[50] As a result of his painstaking research, the novel is stuffed with details of everyday life in the Roman Empire of the first century – how to drive a chariot, ride a camel, row a Roman trireme – and it provides a vivid description of the manners and customs of the peoples of the multicultural eastern Mediterranean, in particular the Holy Land.

As the anecdote about the meeting between Wallace and Ingersoll indicates, the novel appeared at a time of tension between scientific and Biblical authority. Darwin's theory of evolution opened the Bible and its teachings to question. Although the *Origin of Species* was published in 1859, its impact in America occurred after the Civil War. Many Americans felt a dislocating ambivalence toward science. Science was respected since it enabled the technological advances that resulted in industrial progress and great material developments. At the same time, Darwin's investigations obviously were at odds with Biblical views on creation. A number of Protestant conferences addressed the tensions and discrepancies between

the claims of science and those of the Holy Scriptures. The Chautauqua Assembly got its start in 1874 as a two-week meeting for Sunday school teachers. John Heyl Vincent, a Methodist Episcopal bishop and a founder of the Chautauqua Foundation, converted a Methodist camp meeting on the shores of a lake in western New York into a university with a summer program for adults aimed at spiritual renewal. It grew into an educational movement that offered adult education to hundreds of thousands of people, the majority of whom were white, Protestant, middle-class women. The curriculum combined Bible study with courses in history, literature, science, and the arts. A miniature, 350-foot-long "Palestine Park" was created at the camp at Chautauqua; it was used as a teaching device and included having students dress as Arabs.[51] Lew Wallace was a popular Chautauqua lecturer; in 1886, over eight thousand people attended his lecture and reading of portions of *Ben-Hur*, and the novel was added to the Chautauqua reading list for 1887.[52]

Ben-Hur's careful attention to the material aspects of the Roman world in the first century fed the public's appetite for information about the Holy Land and its inhabitants. The fascination with the archaeology of the Holy Land was inspired in part by a growing fissure between science and religion and the strongly felt need to identify and document Biblical events.[53] William McClure Thomson lived in Palestine for 45 years as a missionary and produced *The Land and the Book* in 1859; it appeared in over thirty editions and remained in print into the twentieth century. As he says in his introduction, his goal was to document and to provide illustrations of passages from the Bible:

> The land where the Word-Made-Flesh dwelt amongst men must ever continue to be an important part of Revelation; and Palestine may be fairly regarded as the divinely prepared tablet whereon God's messages to men have been graven in ever-living characters. This fact invests even the geography and topography of the Holy Land with special importance. But there are other considerations which impart to it a deeper and more practical interest. From this land we have received that marvelous spiritual and figurative nomenclature of the Bible through which nearly all true religious knowledge has been communicated to men. Here it was devised and first used, and here are found its best illustrations.[54]

James T. Barclay, another missionary and an amateur archaeologist, wrote *City of the Great King* in 1858, which contained engravings of his own photographs of the Holy Land. In 1894, the N. D. Thompson Company of St. Louis released *Early Footsteps of the Man of Galilee*, a folio edition of 400 reproductions of prints arranged in sequence, one per page, in an effort to recreate, chronologically and geographically, the experiences of following the footsteps of Jesus in Galilee from his birth to his crucifixion.[55] When open, the book was over two feet wide. The captions were provided by James W. Lee, a Protestant minister, and Robert E. M. Bain provided the prints from a trip the two had taken together in 1894. John Heyl Vincent of the Chautauqua Foundation helped write the introduction.

For those who could afford it, tours of the Holy Land were available. Between 1869 and 1882, Thomas Cook's tours brought 4,200 tourists to Palestine, including Mark Twain.[56] Unimpressed, he wrote a satire of it in *Innocents Abroad*, but this did little to deter tourist enthusiasm.[57] Archaeological studies and visits to places mentioned in the Bible offered to many (though not to Mark Twain) reassuring scientific "proof" of scriptural events.

Wallace's meticulous descriptions of the details of everyday life, the terrain, and places mentioned in the Bible gave Jesus and Biblical events a similarly reassuring historicity. Editions of the book were illustrated with drawings and photogravures of the Holy Land. The popular 1892 Garfield edition, for example, was sumptuously illustrated.[58] It was bound in orange silk with gold decorations and the margins of its pages were lavishly embellished with fine line drawings of details of everyday life in Roman Judaea including columns, triremes, gates, coins, musical instruments, incense burners, fruit, vegetables, camels, Roman weapons, and menorahs, all based on study of archaeological texts. The edition also included photogravures of Jerusalem, the Tower of David, the Dead Sea, the Pool of Bethesda, the tombs of Lazarus and Absalom, and the summit of the Mount of Olives.

In fact, Wallace's own spiritual journey was based on just such an education in the history of the Holy Land. In his *Autobiography* he wrote that when he started to write *Ben-Hur*: "I was not in the least influenced by religious sentiment. I had no convictions about God or Christ." It was the researching and writing of his novel, he claimed, that converted him to a belief in Christ. On the first page of his autobiography he wrote: "In the very beginning, before distractions overtake me, I wish to say that I believe absolutely in the Christian conception of God."[59] His firm belief in the divinity of Christ came from his thorough investigation of the period. Wallace's quest reflected and responded to a widespread desire in the United States for reassurance on the historicity of the Bible and the Christian religion in the face of new and unsettling scientific theories and discoveries.

Chosen People, Chosen Nation

Ben-Hur relies on American sympathy and identification with the Old Testament and Biblical Judaism. From the Puritan era on, many American Protestants have identified with Israel, whose sacred history offered a metaphorical narrative for the Puritan founding and establishing of communities in the New World. Like the Jews, the Puritans had suffered under the yoke of tyrannical rulers, and the Jews' exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land was deemed analogous to the Puritan crossing of the Atlantic to the New World. Both journeys and new foundations were perceived as part of a divinely ordained mission to establish the true kingdom of God on earth. Political oratory, literature, and the visual arts from the Puritan era to the present have all made use of a metaphorical identification of America as the Promised Land, the New Jerusalem, and Americans as a Chosen People

with a divine mission. *Ben-Hur* surely owed some of its popularity to its blending of the two narratives into one unifying tale; its hero embodies the virtues of the Old Testament but he embraces the new dispensation; he is both Jew and proto-Christian. His travails and final acceptance of Christ as the Messiah encapsulate in microcosmic form the history (from the Christian perspective) of the transformation of Judaism into Christianity, and Ben-Hur's victory over his Roman enemy, Messala, prefigures Christianity's future triumph over Rome.

In his 1894 *Beacon Lights of Patriotism*, dedicated to American youth, Henry B. Carrington quarried history for incentives to virtue and good citizenship. Carrington connected the American republic and Protestantism to Biblical Judaism. The opening section of the book, "Patriotic Beginnings," begins with Abraham moving from Ur to Canaan. The great American republic, he wrote, has the virtues of the early Hebrew "commonwealth."[60] The Ten Commandments, he claimed, were America's "First Constitution."[61] Moses, he asserted, "led the world's first emancipation movement . . . and organized this horde of bondsmen into the world's first republic, the United States of Israel."[62] This historical trajectory leads directly from Ur to the United States and reflected the Protestant belief in America as a new Israel.

Like many Protestants at the time, Reverend Josiah Strong, author of the influential tract *Our Country* (1885), was convinced that God was preparing the Anglo-Saxon peoples to expand and influence the world by spreading Protestant Christianity:

> It seems to me that God, with infinite wisdom and skill, is training the Anglo-Saxon race for an hour sure to come in the world's future. . . . If I read not amiss, this powerful race will move down upon Mexico, down upon Central and South America, out upon the islands of the sea, over upon Africa and beyond. And can any one doubt that the result of this competition of races will be the "survival of the fittest?"[63]

Reverend Strong was a Congregational pastor interested in "home missions" in the United States. Missions were needed, he believed, to meet the dangers that unrestricted immigration, Catholicism, Mormonism, drink, tobacco, and great disparities in wealth (among other things) presented to social peace and Protestantism.[64] Socialism was a particular concern to Strong. Socialism flourished in cities where:

> Roughs, gamblers, thieves, robbers, lawless and desperate men of all sorts, congregate; men who are ready on any pretext to raise riots for the purpose of destruction and plunder; here gather foreigners and wage-workers who are especially susceptible to socialist arguments; here skepticism and irreligion abound; here inequality is the greatest and most obvious, and the contrast between opulence and penury the most striking; here is suffering the sorest.[65]

These threats apparently needed to be overcome at home as the prerequisite for America's worldwide mission.

The idea of a Chosen People (Anglo-Saxon Protestants) and Nation fused with positive images of conquest and expansion. Reverend Strong wrote:

> Like the star in the East which guided the three kings with their treasures westward until at length it stood still over the cradle of the young Christ, so the star of empire, rising in the East, has ever beckoned the wealth and power of nations westward, until today it stands still over the cradle of the young empire of the West.[66]

Strong quoted John Adams to buttress his views. Adams recorded that nothing was "more ancient in his memory than the observation that arts, sciences and empire had traveled westward; and in conversation it was always added that their next leap would be over the Atlantic into America."[67] "This," Strong wrote, "will be but the consummation of a movement as old as civilization."[68]

Strong's views helped prepare the ground for the imperialism of the 1898 Spanish–American War with his doctrine of world mission intertwined with a Darwinian theory of the racial supremacy of a vigorous, Anglo-Saxon, "pure," Christian people.[69] The irrepressible Senator Albert J. Beveridge frequently used this rhetoric when urging America to support the war and an American empire. "We will not renounce our part in the mission of our race, trustee, under God, of the civilization of the world . . . Almighty God has marked us as His chosen people henceforth to lead in the regeneration of the world."[70] Here was a progressive civilization fulfilling a providential mission. By divine will, the United States would not repeat imperial Rome's trajectory. In contrast to Thomas Cole's interpretation of Bishop George Berkeley's lines:

> Westward the course of empire takes its way;
> The four first Acts already past,
> A fifth shall close the Drama with the day;
> Time's noblest offspring is the last

as articulating the idea of an unvarying cycle of imperial rise and decline, Americans now viewed those lines as a forecast of the great imperial destiny of America.[71] Americans had a special dispensation and calling in the world as the home of a rising benevolent empire.

Making Room for Wealth and Empire

The popularity of *Ben-Hur* coincided with a period of great political and social unrest as well as a rising imperialism.[72] Seven-eighths of the nation's wealth was in the hands of one eighth of the population – indicating a huge disparity between the post-Civil War plutocracy and the rest of the population. Strikes and urban unrest were widespread. There was increasing unease amongst the middle classes over the influx of immigrants into the nation's cities, working-class and immigrant

political radicalism, and militant unionism. Both the wealthy and the middle classes viewed socialists and anarchists with suspicion and fear. Nightmarish visions of an urban Armageddon were widespread in the literature of the time: Joaquin Miller's *The Destruction of Gotham* (1886), for example, features Bowery mobs sacking and burning the mansions of the wealthy. The fires become an inferno that consumes corporate office buildings and carries rivers of molten lead through the city, purging and purifying it. In popular historical novels set in ancient Rome, like Bulwer-Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii*, Henryk Sienkiewicz's 1895 *Quo Vadis*, and Wallace's *Ben-Hur*, Roman cities and their luxury-loving citizens represent the dark side of empire, its corrupt, decadent, and oppressive face.

For the bulk of the readership of *Ben-Hur*, the disruptive and radical behavior of some of the working class was distinctly unappealing and threatening. The middle class and many members of the working class did not oppose capitalism. They hoped to acquire wealth. Indeed, the sanctity of wealth was championed by church leaders and public figures and in "rags to riches" stories like Horatio Alger's *Ragged Dick* (1868), which presented businessmen as models of virtue.

The popular Philadelphia minister Russell Conwell preached that it was a Christian and godly duty to have money. In 1887 the Business Man's Association of Grace Baptist Church published Conwell's sermon "Acres of Diamonds," a lecture first given to the Chautauqua Assembly in 1886 (the same year that Lew Wallace gave a reading of *Ben-Hur* to the Assembly) in a collection of his sermons, *Gleams of Grace*, and in 1887 it was published as a book and reprinted multiple times. Conwell traveled throughout the country preaching his message of the spiritual benefits of wealth, speaking over six thousand times to audiences estimated at 13 million.[73] "I say you ought to get rich, and it is our duty to get rich . . . to make money honestly is to preach the gospel," he asserted.[74] Turning older Christian views of wealth on their head, he preached that money is not intrinsically corrupting (filthy lucre) nor is great wealth a sign of greed or spiritual laxity: "It is an awful mistake of these pious people to think you must be awfully poor in order to be pious." Money should be seen as a force for good: "Money is power . . . you can do more good with it than you could without it." As for the alleged corruption and flaws of millionaires, Conwell, a Republican, claimed that "ninety-eight out of one hundred of the rich men of America are honest. That is why they are rich. That is why they carry on great enterprises and find plenty of people to work with them. It is because they are honest men." Conwell urged his huge audiences to seek wealth actively as a means of doing God's will in the world.

What about the poor?

> To sympathize with [a] man whom God had punished for his sins, thus to help him when God would still continue a just punishment, is to do wrong, no doubt about it, and we do that more than we help those who are deserving. While we should sympathize with God's poor – that is, those who cannot help themselves – let us remember there is not a poor person in the United States who was not made poor by his own shortcomings, or by the shortcomings of someone else.

In short, poverty was the result of moral failing or divine punishment. Conwell's views on wealth and poverty resonated with millions of Americans. Josiah Strong expressed similar views, arguing that money was not evil; rather it was the "modern miracle worker," and he urged that "the money power be Christianized." *Our Country* aimed to persuade the rich and the middle-class to use their wealth in the service of God, which would transform the "kingdoms of this world" into "the kingdoms of our Lord."[75] Andrew Carnegie, at least, heeded the call and repeated these views in his own influential article "Wealth" in 1889. Carnegie, as we have seen, believed that the rich should use part of their fortunes for philanthropy. Like Conwell and Strong, Carnegie preached what some called "the Gospel of Wealth." Wealth is a positive good and if it is joined with Christianity and benefits the larger Christian community, it becomes a form of piety.

Ben-Hur exemplifies this Christian piety. At the end of the novel he is a Christian and also one of the richest men in the Roman world. In addition to the recovery of his own fortune, he has also inherited Sheikh Ilderim's fortune. In the last passage of the novel, Ben-Hur discusses with Simonides what he ought to do with his riches.

> "The fortune was meant for the service of the giver; not a part, Simonides, but all of it. The question with me has been, How can I make it most useful in his cause? And of that tell me, I pray you."
>
> Simonides answered, "The great sums you have given to the church here in Antioch, I am witness to. Now, instantly almost with this gift of the generous sheik's comes the news of the persecution of the brethren in Rome. It is the opening of a new field. The light must not go out in the capital."
>
> "Tell me how I can keep it alive."
>
> "I will tell you . . . if you cannot build temples for the worship of the Lord above ground, then build them below the ground; and to keep them from profanation, carry to them the bodies of all who die in the faith."
>
> Ben-Hu arose excitedly.
>
> "It is a great idea. I will not wait to begin it . . . I will sail tomorrow."
>
> If any of my readers, visiting Rome, will make the short journey to the Catacomb of San Calixto, which is more ancient than that of San Sebastiano, he will see what became of the fortune of Ben-Hur, and give him thanks. Out of that vast tomb Christianity issued to supersede the Caesars.
>
> The End.[76]

Ben-Hur, rich as any American nineteenth-century robber baron, becomes a pious philanthropist. His fortune will be used in the service of Christ in building catacombs where Christians can bury their dead and worship. Wealth and power are good when they are allied with Christianity. Lew Wallace's message for Americans was that the myriad social and economic problems besetting the nation should be met with a re-infusion of religious enthusiasm and spiritual values.[77] Ben-Hur initially wanted to lead a revolt against Rome but was persuaded that Christ was a spiritual leader not a political activist. One of the three wise men, Balthasar,

tells him: "the Redemption cannot be for a political purpose – to pull down rulers and powers, and vacate their places merely that others may take and enjoy them. . . . I tell you . . . He that comes is to be a Savior of souls."[78] Instead of political action, the novel affirms the power of redemption and the need for spiritual transformation. Spiritual evolution rather than the political revolution advocated by reformers and political activists is the way forward.

Ben-Hur's example validated a rejection of the radical political changes called for by labor activists and socialists. Like Bulwer-Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii*, Lew Wallace's novel provided millions of Americans with a metaphorical frame for the projection, containment, and resolution of contemporary concerns over the state and future of the increasingly prosperous yet economically divided American nation. Both novels implicitly accommodate empire. If the American nation were Christian, it would fulfill God's purpose in redeeming the world. Divine sanction would legitimate and protect America from the corruption and decline that led to Rome's downfall. In contrast to Bulwer-Lytton's novel's critique of wealth, Ben-Hur's easy accommodation of Mammon chimed with a powerful Protestant discourse that viewed wealth, power, and empire as virtue made manifest.

Notes

1 Fascination with Roman decadence and cruelty is also evident in popular paintings, especially those of Jean-Léon Gérôme. See figure 4.2 as an example.
2 For example, (1837). "Destruction and recreation of Pompeii." *American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge* (February 1, 3; 5).
3 Twain quoted in Wyke (1997), 151.
4 Bulwer-Lytton (1834; rpt. 1946). Further quotations will be cited parenthetically in the text.
5 For a discussion of the pyro-drama of *The Last Days of Pompeii*, see chapter 6.
6 William Ware's best-selling novel *Zenobia: Or the Fall of Palmyra* (published in 1837 as *Letters from Palmyra*) also employs the theme of disaster leading to religious conversion. In this novel, the Roman narrator, L. Manlius Piso, having seen the collapse of the once shining and proud city of Palmyra, embraces Christianity.
7 McConachie (1992), 30–3. Describing the popularity of the paintings of John Martin, art historian Angela Miller suggests that they "played on the Protestant guilt of middle-class audiences luxuriating in a new sense of prosperity and material abundance . . . [they] expressed a pervasive Anglo-American fear that commercial prosperity, pride, and empire would culminate in a national day of reckoning." A. Miller (1993), 35.
8 Wilentz (2005), 267.
9 Hatch (1989).
10 "The evening scene fills you with singular emotion. It requires but a slight stretch of the imagination, to feel as though you were in the vicinity of Pompeii, with Vesuvius sending up its lurid glare close at hand, throwing a melancholy light over the deserted ruins." (1836) "The ruins in New York fifteen days after the fire," *Family Magazine: Or, Monthly Abstract of General Knowledge* (May 1): 303.

11 A. Miller (1993), 35.
12 Dahl (1953) and (1959).
13 Dahl (1953), 434.
14 Trollope (1974), 79.
15 Ibid., 172.
16 (1826) "The grandeur of God," *Casket* 1/8: 244.
17 Cf. "Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cinarae" (Horace, *Carmina* IV.1), where Horace writes that he is not the man he was when he was passionately involved with the prostitute Cinara.
18 (1835) "*The Last Days of Pompeii*," book review, North American Review 40/87: 453.
19 Winterer (2002), 51–76.
20 The *Apollo Belvedere* was a Roman copy, probably of a bronze original made by the Athenian sculptor Leochares, who worked for Alexander the Great, around 320 BCE. The *Apollo Belvedere* was discovered in the late 1400s near Rome, and has been in the Vatican since 1511, in the Cortile del Belvedere, from which it gets its name.
21 W. A. Cooper (1993), 20.
22 According to Kasson, for *The Greek Slave*, "Powers invented his own story, one which stressed his subject's powerlessness rather than her power. He offered a narrative of pathos and violence – a contemporary Greek woman captured by invading Turks, abducted and sold into slavery. Visual details informed audiences that she was a pious, faithful woman: a locket and cross hanging on her abandoned clothing suggest a lost love and a sustaining Christian faith. Stripped naked, displayed for sale in the market place, her hands chained, she was absolved from responsibility for her own downfall." J. S. Kasson (1990), 49–50.
23 Hughes (1997), 216–17.
24 Parian was a marble-like unglazed porcelain developed during the 1840s and used for sculptural pieces
25 *Courier Français* (June 7, 1821), quoted in Bernal (1987), 291.
26 Wilberforce quoted in Coupland (1923), 445–6.
27 Some readers of Bulwer-Lytton's novel – and perhaps some who saw Powers's *Greek Slave* – may have read or at least heard of the novel *The Lustful Turk*, first published in 1828. In this novel, two English maidens, bound for India, are captured by Turks, deflowered, and put in the lustful Turk's harem to be repeatedly enjoyed by him. The novel describes the English women's sexual awakening. *The Lustful Turk* is an early example of Victorian pornography. For a discussion of this novel, see Marcus (1966), 200–17.
28 Wyke (1997), 154. Catharine Edwards has suggested that Bulwer-Lytton intended an analogy between the height of Roman civilization and the height of British civilization; and "Christianity was to be the link which bound the nineteenth century to the first." Liversidge and Edwards (1996), 15.
29 Kelly (1980), vol. 2, 193–4.
30 The novel was adapted for the stage by William Young, and Klaw and Erlanger produced the six-act play.
31 For the popularity of the novel and the life of its author, I draw on Morseberger and Morseberger (1980), esp. 447–98; McKee (1947); and L. Wallace (1906).
32 Kennedy (1987), 17.

33 George R. Parrish to Wallace, January 5, 1887, Wallace Manuscripts, Indiana University, quoted in Theisen (1984), 36.
34 Morseberger and Morseberger (1980), 448; 442; 498.
35 Tinkcom (1982) , esp. 112–41, has been helpful for my summary and analysis.
36 (1905) "The winner in the chariot race," *Nation* (February 23): 148–9.
37 Ibid.
38 Gutjahr (1993).
39 (1905) "The winner in the chariot race," *Nation* (February 23): 148–9.
40 Mayer in L. Wallace (1998), xiii.
41 In one New Mexican anecdote about Lew Wallace, passed down through the Menaul family, Eri Hunt, a member of a surveying team, remembers Lew Wallace spinning tales around a campfire in New Mexico: " 'Down in yonder arroyo I see something move,' " said Wallace. 'It is a camel, a white camel belonging to the priesthood. On the camel rises one with flowing robes of purest white. It is the dress of the ancient priesthood of the Magi.' Those evening stories by Lew Wallace, told under the stars in a setting much like that of the land of Judaea, affected some of the men deeply . . . *Ben Hur* [sic] had as its base those stories." Menaul (1977), 66.
42 Allmendinger makes this point (1999), 37–9. Wallace's novel manifests a number of traits Cawelti has argued are typical of the Western: action that "takes place on or near a frontier" when "civilization" and "savagery" clash; three types of characters (law-abiding "townspeople;" "savages" who are in the unredeemed wilderness; and a "hero" who remains poised between these two spheres); and a backdrop of nature where heroes attempt to tame the frontier, while avoiding being swallowed up by harsh terrain or killed by "savages." Cawelti (1984), 39–42.
43 Cawelti (1984), 46–7; Wright (1975), 59–74; 154–63; Allmendinger (1999), 39–40.
44 Cawelti (1971; 2nd edition, 1984), 66.
45 Slotkin (1973).
46 Cinematic examples include the end of the 1939 *Stagecoach* (dir. John Ford), when John Wayne (Ringo), facing off against three men, has only three bullets. He kills all three and his lethal ability testifies to his moral goodness. In the 1952 *High Noon* (dir. Fred Zinnemann), Gary Cooper rejects his wife's Quaker pacifism and takes up arms and kills; in the moral universe of the Western this is the superior thing to do and it elevates Cooper to heroic stature.
47 McKee (1947), 186.
48 (1905) "The winner in the chariot race," *Nation* (February 23): 149.
49 *New York Star* (May 25, 1891).
50 Mayer in L. Wallace (1998), xvii.
51 J. Davis (1996), 88.
52 Theisen (1984), 35.
53 Gutjahr (1993), 60–3.
54 Thomson (1859), 1.
55 J. Davis (1996), 77–8.
56 Gutjahr (1993), 62.
57 "These gifted Latin monks never do any thing by halves. If they were to show you the Brazen Serpent that was elevated in the wilderness, you could depend upon it that they had on hand the pole it was elevated on also, and even the hole it stood

in. They have got the 'Grotto' of the Annunciation here; and just as convenient to it as one's throat is to his mouth, they have also the Virgin's Kitchen, and even her sitting-room, where she and Joseph watched the infant Savior play with Hebrew toys eighteen hundred years ago. All under one roof, and all clean, spacious, comfortable 'grottoes.' It seems curious that personages intimately connected with the Holy Family always lived in grottoes – in Nazareth, in Bethlehem, in imperial Ephesus – and yet nobody else in their day and generation thought of doing any thing of the kind. If they ever did, their grottoes are all gone, and I suppose we ought to wonder at the peculiar marvel of the preservation of these I speak of." Twain (1996), 528.

58 L. Wallace (1892).
59 L. Wallace (1906), 1–2.
60 Carrington (1894), 18.
61 Ibid., 24.
62 Ibid., 29.
63 Strong (1885; 1963), 214.
64 Trachtenberg (1982), 78–9; on the dangers: Strong (1885; 1963), 54–55. Strong's chapter headings are "Perils – Immigration"; "Perils – Romanism"; "Perils – Mormonism"; "Perils – Socialism"; etc.
65 Strong (1885; 1963), 176.
66 Strong quoted in Trachtenberg (1982), 12.
67 J. Adams (1856), vol. 9, 599–600, from "Letter to Benjamin Rush," May 23, 1807, quoted in Strong (1885; 1963), 206.
68 Strong (1885; 1963), 206.
69 Protestant Christianity was "pure," unlike the corrupted Roman Catholicism of the inhabitants of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines.
70 Beveridge (1900).
71 See the discussion of Cole's painting and Berkeley's poem in chapter 1.
72 For the context for the novel, see Hart (1950), 158–201.
73 Hart (1950), 161.
74 Conwell (1915). Quotations are taken from the online version of this sermon.
75 Strong (1885; 1963), xxiii.
76 L. Wallace (1998), 520–1.
77 For extended analysis, see Tinkcom (1982), 122–6; 135–6.
78 L. Wallace (1998), 257.

6

The Pleasures of Empire

When the Columbian Exposition in Chicago opened to the public on May 1, 1893, it was as if Thomas Cole's painting *The Consummation of Empire* (see figure 1.5 above) had taken material form. The Columbian Exposition commemorated the four-hundredth anniversary of Columbus's arrival in the New World and gave architectural form to American visions of empire, to the concept of manifest destiny, and to a linear, progressive vision of history.[1] Chicago business elites put up the money, and Congress appropriated funds to supplement the event, consolidating an alliance between industrial capitalism and the federal government that had begun in the aftermath of the Civil War. Whereas Thomas Cole used classical architecture and symbols in *The Course of Empire* series to warn against luxury and imperial overreach, the Columbian Exposition's white plaster city used neoclassical art and architecture to celebrate the benefits of American power and plenty (figure 6.1).

Popular culture, public spectacles, and architecture all celebrated America's drive toward empire. This is evident in grand designs for civic architecture and commercial display such as public exhibitions like the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, in neoclassical architecture and the "City Beautiful" movement, and in popular entertainments that invoked the spirit of the Roman Colosseum and the Circus Maximus. With imperial triumphal arches, public baths, and even a restaurant called Murray's Roman Gardens, America clothed itself in imperial finery as it set about acquiring and then taking pleasure in its new empire. Many Americans believed their empire could be a beneficent one, rooted in the virtues and values of earlier republican times but now resplendent in material magnificence. They unabashedly celebrated the parallels they perceived between the glories of imperial Rome and America's own imperial dreams. The symbolic elasticity and flexibility of the neo-Roman idiom allowed plutocrats, imperialists, and ordinary Americans to invoke the power, might, and wealth of Rome as a positive model for America even as labor movements and political reformers warned against repeating Rome's collapse. While the tradition of culling admonitory exempla from the myth of the

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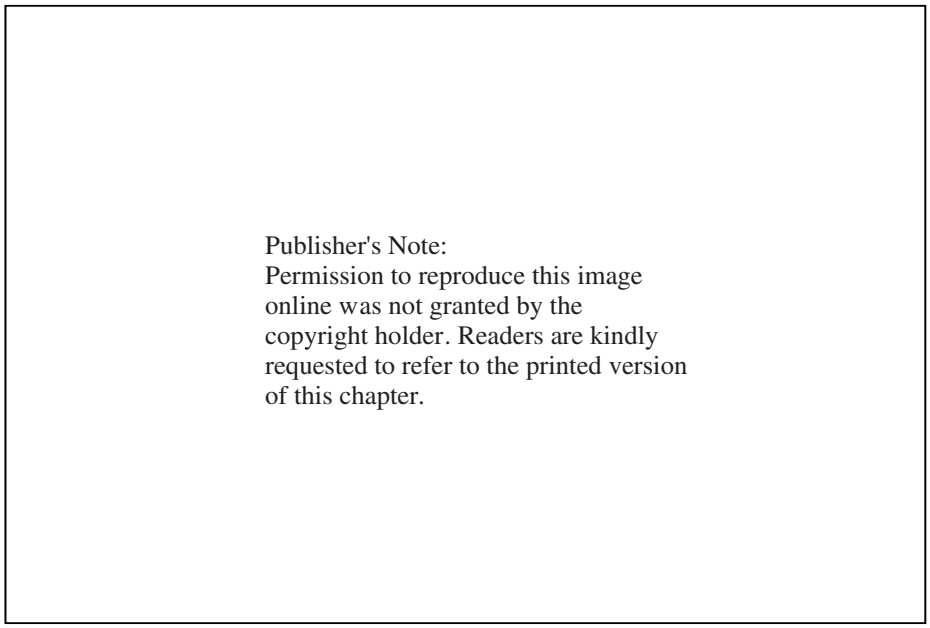
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Figure 6.1 Lithograph of White City Court of Honor, c.1893. Courtesy of the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

rise and fall of Rome persisted, it was overshadowed by a showy, celebratory conflation of the ancient Roman and modern American empires.

Visions of Empire

The planning committee for the Columbian Exposition recruited prominent architects from around the country to design the Exposition's major buildings, and the result was a monumental, harmonious, and unified vision of a utopian city.[2] Millions of Americans visited the White City. It was, said one rapturous observer, "the finest architectural view that has ever been beheld on our planet."[3] For some visitors, the White City suggested a Celestial City: "To see this miracle of harmonious form at sunset, with all its lovely length shining down the lagoon, is easily to believe in its heavenly origin."[4] It seemed to some people that the New Jerusalem was incarnate in the White City, an image that has deep roots in American culture. For others, imperial Rome was the analogy that sprang easily to mind.[5] According to one visitor, it was grander than even the fabled magnificence of imperial Rome: "No Roman emperor in the plenitude of his power ever conceived so vast a festival as this."[6] The White City thus articulated in plaster two mythic origin narratives: America as the new Rome, and America as the City on a Hill, the New Jerusalem.[7]

Daniel Burnham, the chief architect of the White City, preferred the Roman analogy. He claimed it was "what the Romans would have wished to create in permanent form."[8] The incorporation of classical architecture and of its adaptations in Renaissance and European neoclassicism into a new American architecture suggested that American civilization had assimilated, and now stood poised to supersede, the cultural achievements of past and present civilizations. The 1893 fair, said another enthusiast, marked "a point in civilization never before reached by any people" and was "the dawn of a new era."[9] The final act of Imre Kiralfy's *America*, an elaborate stage-spectacle produced for the 1893 Columbian Exposition, featured the nations of the world bowing in homage to the Goddess of Chicago.[10] Kiralfy intended this to represent American genius and America's role in the spread of civilization. The White City offered visitors a progressive and imperialistic vision of the American city of the future; the consummation of empire was now legitimated as a utopian objective.

Henry Adams, who found his visit to the Exhibition profoundly educational ("he found it a matter of study to fill a hundred years"),[11] had a more complex reaction to its size, splendor, and imperializing unified design. It stirred both astonishment and thoughts of his reverie on the steps of Santa Maria in Aracoeli on the north side of the Capitoline Hill in Rome, where, as we have seen in chapter 4, he was so profoundly struck by the similarities between the Roman and American empires:

> The first astonishment became greater every day. That the Exposition should be a natural growth and product of the Northwest offered a step in evolution to startle Darwin; but that it should be anything else seemed an idea more startling still; and even granting it were not – admitting it to be a sort of industrial, speculative growth and product of the Beaux Arts artistically induced to pass the summer on the shore of Lake Michigan – could it be made to seem at home there? Was the American made to seem at home in it? . . . For the moment he seemed to have leaped directly from Corinth and Syracuse and Venice, over the heads of London and New York, to impose classical standards on plastic Chicago. . . . One sat down to ponder on the steps beneath Richard Hunt's dome almost as deeply as on the steps of Ara Coeli, and much to the same purpose. Here was a breach of continuity – a rupture in historical sequence! Was it real, or only apparent? One's personal universe hung on the answer, for, if the rupture was real and the new American world could take this sharp and conscious twist towards ideals, one's personal friends would come in, at last, as winners in the great American chariot-race for fame. If the people of the Northwest actually knew what was good when they saw it, they would some day talk about Hunt and Richardson, La Farge and St. Gaudens, Burnham and McKim, and Stanford White when their politicians and millionaires were otherwise forgotten. (340–1)

Adams's recollection of Rome speaks to the evocative power of the Exposition's classical style. In Virgil's *Aeneid*, written during the principate of the first Roman emperor, Augustus, Evander shows Aeneas a "palimpsestic" view of the future city

of Rome.[12] Aeneas sees cattle grazing in green pastures where the luxurious neighborhood of Carinae will be built. Near the green meadows, he can see the golden dome of the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus. Close to the rustic hut of Rome's founder, Romulus, on the Palatine Hill, will stand the magnificent marble complex built by Augustus. At the foot of the Palatine Hill, Aeneas sees the Lupercal, the cave where Romulus and Remus had allegedly been found, and the fig tree under which they were suckled. Evander invites him to spend the night in his small hut, and Aeneas sleeps on a bed of leaves, covered by a bear skin. Catharine Edwards has argued that the layered combination of the rustic past and the golden present roots Rome's imperial age – and the accomplishments of its present ruler – in Rome's virtuous, agricultural, republican past.[13] Like this passage in Virgil's epic, Chicago's White City offered a palimpsest of America's colonial and revolutionary past and imperial present. The utopian city's magnificent buildings contained early American relics: the government buildings displayed a Bible printed in 1559 that the Puritans carried with them on the *Mayflower*; a fragment of Plymouth Rock; the pipe of Miles Standish; Benedict Arnold's fife; and the Latin grammar that General Joseph Warren had used.[14] There were also reproductions of the boats Columbus and his crew sailed to the New World. Joining these relics and reproductions was the original manuscript, written in purple ink, of Lew Wallace's *Ben-Hur*, indicating its ascension to the status of sacred narrative. Interspersed among the neoclassical buildings that displayed the wonders of American technology and industrial production, these relics linked the progressive imperial present with the virtues and values of earlier times.

For a visitor like Henry Adams, the effect of the coalescence of past, present, and future in the White City was dramatic; the palimpsestic Exposition raised not only memories of his own experiences and thoughts of Rome and empire, but also questions about the future course of American history as the nation drove "unconsciously" down the road to an imperial future:

> Chicago asked in 1893 for the first time the question whether the American people knew where they were driving. Adams answered, for one, that he did not know, but would try to find out. On reflecting sufficiently deeply, under the shadow of Richard Hunt's architecture, he decided that the American people probably knew no more than he did; but that they might still be driving or drifting unconsciously to some point in thought, as their solar system was said to be drifting towards some point in space; and that, possibly, if relations enough could be observed, this point might be fixed. Chicago was the first expression of American thought as a unity; one must start there. (343)

Staging Empire

Many visitors to the White City also went to the Chicago Coliseum and enjoyed Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show, where the conquest of the American West

was performed in a Roman-style arena.[15] Roman triumphs involved ritual processions of the defeated peoples through the imperial metropolis; and in Roman games in the arena captives, criminals, and slaves engaged in violent combat for the entertainment of spectators. In a similar vein, Buffalo Bill's shows fed the public's desire for victory and glory in the re-enactment of decisive battles in the history of America's westward expansion, performances in which Native Americans frequently acted out their own defeat at the hands of the US cavalry. The show was wildly popular and became frequently imitated in the entertainment sections of a number of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American fairs and expositions. At the Midway Heights at the 1895 Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition, for example, the Sioux were obliged to re-enact their own defeat and humiliation at Wounded Knee in the same lodges, transported to the Midway and re-created, that the government had fired upon at Wounded Knee.[16] The 1901 Pan American Exposition in Buffalo featured a Congress of American Indians whose members fought sham battles against each other in a Roman arena, and at the 1898 Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition at Omaha an Indian Congress participated in a parade with a float entitled "The Vanquished Races."[17] The program for the Omaha parade referred to the "Indians" as peoples "destined to fade before a mightier race." In the fair arena at Omaha, Native Americans fought whites until the US cavalry arrived, when the Native Americans surrendered, and were then led to a reservation. When President McKinley visited the Omaha Indian Congress before the show, the Native American performers were obliged to greet him. He and the crowd then witnessed the spectacle of Native Americans fighting each other, complete with sham burnings at the stake and scalpings.[18] A writer for *Cosmopolitan Magazine* summed up the significance of this display and the "Vanquished Races" float by quoting the famous salute gladiators were popularly believed to have offered to Roman emperors as they stood in the arena before battle: "Caesar, those who are about to die, salute you." For the writer, "Indians," like gladiators, were doomed, and there was something poetic and dramatic in such "a great meeting of a vanishing race."[19]

Looking back at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in 1924, architectural critic Lewis Mumford suggested that America's imperial age was foreshadowed in the Chicago Exposition and that it "reproduced in miniature the coming imperial order." Roman-inspired architecture, he wrote, was eminently suitable for the times, since it was the "very cloak and costume of imperial enterprise."[20] In Chicago, even as the Columbian Exposition opened, Frederick Jackson Turner delivered his now famous address to the American Historical Association's 1893 annual meeting. In "The significance of the frontier in American history" he argued that the frontier (along with its Native American inhabitants) was the crucible in which American democracy, inventiveness, independence, and individualism were forged.[21] For Turner, the closing of the frontier was cause for concern – was anything left to conquer? Certainly the closing of the American West coupled with rapid industrialism precipitated a desire for further territorial acquisitions no longer necessarily

contiguous with the existing nation. Illinois's Senator Cullom, an ardent advocate of American expansion and a major backer of the Chicago Exposition, put it bluntly: "It is time someone woke up and realized the necessity of annexing some property. We want all [sic] this northern hemisphere."[22] Industrial capitalists wanted new overseas markets in Asia, and acquiring several islands in the Pacific that were strategically located for re-fueling was the first logical step. The Philippines were taken as spoils of the 1898 Spanish–American War. Hawaii and Guam were also annexed in 1898. In addition to these Pacific territories, the United States annexed Puerto Rico in 1898 and oversaw the formation of a "protectorate" in Cuba in 1903.

As the United States spread beyond its continental borders and began to acquire an overseas empire, the enactments of the conquest of Native Americans at the fairs expanded to include the defeat of non-American peoples and displays of the primitive nature of the newly conquered. In 1899, Richard Slotkin tells us, shortly after the end of the Spanish–American War, the performance of "Custer's Last Fight" in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show was replaced by the "Battle of San Juan Hill," which celebrated the actions in Cuba of Theodore Roosevelt, whose First Volunteer Cavalry was nicknamed "The Rough Riders."[23] This show and others like it featured re-creations of the defeat of Cuban and Filipino rebels. As Slotkin has noted, the defeat of Spain and the conquest of the Philippines and other Spanish territories were thus invested with the aura and imagery of the heroic conquest of the "Wild" West.[24] Like Indians, Filipinos were coded as savages.[25] Roosevelt's imperialist sentiments and exploits were framed in familiar terms, and American imperialism abroad was acted out in the fairs in Wild West style, legitimating it as part of the same mythological narrative and process as the American conquest of the West. American actions outside the borders of the United States marked the dawn of America's Pacific Empire and the emergence of the United States as an imperial power, but as these popular entertainments indicate, the ideologies that fueled this overseas expansion were rooted in America's triumphant conquest of its own indigenous populations and its defeat of other colonial powers in North America.

"Take up the White Man's burden," Rudyard Kipling told Americans in 1899:

> Send forth the best ye breed –
> Go bind your sons to exile
> To serve your captives' need;
> To wait in heavy harness,
> On fluttered folk and wild –
> Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
> Half-devil and half-child.[26]

The business elites who backed the Spanish–American War and sponsored other World's Fairs and Expositions were eager to respond to Kipling's challenge (perhaps they did not read the poem very carefully). An advertising poster for the

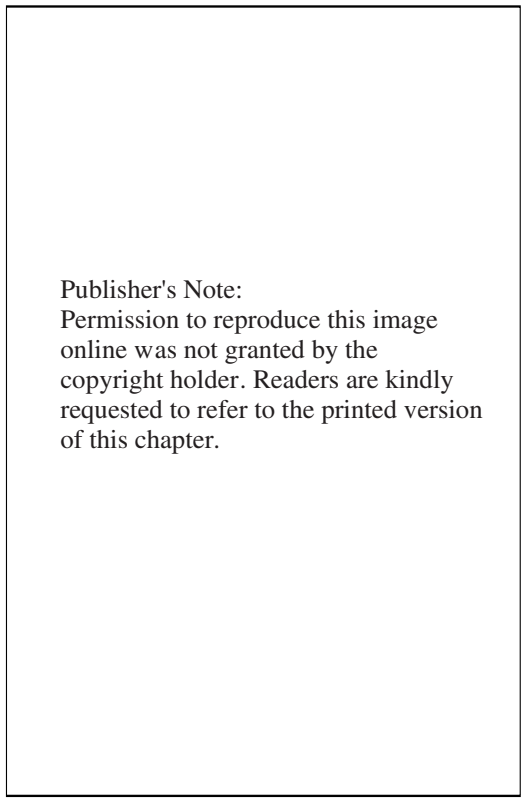
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Figure 6.2 Advertising poster for the Omaha Greater America Exposition, 1899.

1899 Omaha Greater America Exposition proclaimed that the Exposition would contain the United States' "First Colonial Exhibit" (figure 6.2). "Omaha will be the first American city to exploit the wonders of the colonial possessions," announced the 1899 official guide of the Exposition.[27] By the end of the 1890s, the visions of empire evident in the World's Fairs and Expositions had become a reality: America had joined the European imperial powers as a great power ruling over millions of non-Europeans, and the good citizens of Omaha could share in the spoils.

Apologists for American imperialism cited progress, manifest destiny, and the spread of civilization as justification for dominion. Speaking in favor of an American empire in early 1900, Senator Albert J. Beveridge announced that "the power that rules the Pacific . . . is the power that rules the world" and the "imperial destiny" of America was "to establish the supremacy of the American republic over the Pacific and throughout the East till the end of time"[28] (figure 6.3). Having embraced empire, confident that God was on Christian America's side, many Americans now looked to imperial Rome as a source for symbols of her new imperial power and position.

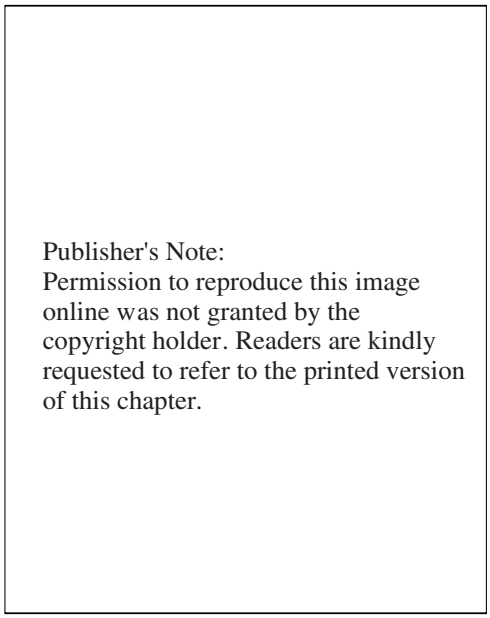
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Figure 6.3 Thomas Fleming, *Senator Albert Jeremiah Beveridge*, 1902. Senator Beveridge in a toga points toward the Philippines. Published in Thomas Fleming, *Around the Capital with Uncle Hank*. New York: Nutshell Publishing Co., 1902.

Building Power

The White City was the antithesis of the gritty, industrial, immigrant reality of Chicago, that

> Hog Butcher for the World,
> Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
> Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler;
> Stormy, husky, brawling,
> City of the Big Shoulders,

as socialist writer and poet Carl Sandburg famously described it.[29] This Chicago stood cheek by jowl with, but a world away from, the White City's ordered, harmonious, and unified mirage of urban life. One visitor wrote of the soothing pleasure a visit to the white neoclassical city gave him:

> Coming to these grounds from the crowded thoroughfares of Chicago, where the sharp gong of the street cars and the rumble of vehicles was an interminable reminder of the constant threat to personal safety in the crowded streets, it was an unspeakable and indescribable relief to move freely in the midst of the great throngs and not feel in imminent danger.[30]

The utilization of the architectural language of Rome, filtered through the Beaux-Arts movement, created a deeply satisfying illusion of imperial grandeur, civic order, prosperity, and authority.

The 1893 Columbian Exposition launched an architectural revival of classicism, a movement architectural historians have called the "American Renaissance."[31] Neoclassicism remained a key feature of the White City style as it spread across the nation. In the realm of urban design it was called the City Beautiful movement, and it transformed urban spaces and architecture in a host of major American cities.[32] There was certainly a desire at the turn of the century for harmonious and coherent civic symbols. Waves of immigration and migrations of African Americans to cities in the wake of the Civil War swelled urban populations, while rapid industrialization and the rise of corporate monopolies further fragmented public life.[33] Huge economic, social, and cultural differences divided workers and urban elites. How then was America to create a homogenous whole out of diversity? The City Beautiful movement took on the task of fabricating a grand and unifying civic architecture and creating architectural spaces for the acting out of America's new roles and identity.[34] Architects like Stanford White and Daniel Burnham helped create and choreograph sets for civic activities, pageants, and spectacles. Many architects and their patrons were captivated by the monumentality, scale, and accomplishments of imperial Rome and its adaptations and uses in Renaissance and European neoclassicism. In city after city across the nation, the fabled "might" of Rome was translated into power and wealth in the built environment and became a positive ground of identification in federal and state office buildings, train stations, public baths, museums, civic monuments, concert halls, libraries, banks, and universities.[35]

The phrase from Bishop George Berkeley's poem, "Westward the course of empire takes its way," had a special resonance for San Francisco, the city on the edge of the Pacific Ocean.[36] San Franciscans, as Gray Brechin has noted, "never tired of telling outsiders and one another that their city by the Golden Gate was the Mistress of the Pacific, the Queen City on her seven hills, looking westward to a destiny proportionately greater than that of imperial Rome."[37] Poetry and essays published in California's *Sunset Magazine* cited Berkeley's "prophecy" constantly, while frequent comparisons of San Francisco to Rome show that San Franciscans enthusiastically embraced their city's imperial destiny, as this poem reveals:

> Imperial Rome on Seven Hills
> Sat, and her greatness from afar
> Was seen by all the world;
> But in her day the world itself
> A single hemisphere barely encompassed,
> Imperial San Francisco from her hundred hills
> Looks out upon a field so vast
> That all the glories of the days long gone
> Are overcast,

> And through her ever open gate
> The nations of the earth their treasures bring.
> Fair city of the West,
> Translucent mirror of the Golden State,
> Fit portal of an empire great and free,
> We thee salute! [38]

Mayor James Duval Phelan insisted that the Philippines "would be the entering wedge of the commercial progress of the United States in the Orient," and Hugh Craig, president of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, predicted that "the nation that shall control the business of Asia will control the world."[39] San Franciscans positioned themselves to do just that: a cover of *Sunset Magazine* features an image of San Francisco as a Roman centurion, straddling the Golden Gate and pointing his sword toward the Pacific (figure 6.4).[40]

San Francisco's city leaders repeatedly declared that Admiral Dewey's victory over the Spanish at Manila Bay prepared the city for its "Roman" destiny and for the riches of empire. San Francisco's victory parades welcoming troops home from the Spanish–American War rivaled even those of Philadelphia and New York. "No conqueror of imperial Rome ever had a more glorious welcome than these sons of California," crowed the San Francisco *Examiner*.[41] San Francisco veterans of past and present wars "marched through sham triumphal arches down Market Street to the accompaniment of military bands."[42] When Mayor Phelan wrote to sculptor Douglas Tilden to persuade him to design a monument commemorating the US victory, he quoted Robert Louis Stevenson's words in The *Wrecker* (1892), as London Dodd gazed out over the Pacific toward Asia:

> I stood up there on the extreme shore of the West and of to-day. Seventeen hundred years ago, and seven thousand miles to the East, the legionaries stood, perhaps, upon the walls of Antoninus and looked northward toward the mountains of the Picts. For all the interval of time and space, I, when I looked from the Cliff House, on the broad Pacific, was that man's heir and analogue – each of us standing on the verge of the Roman Empire (or as we now call it, Western Civilization), each gazing onward into zones unromanized.[43]

Stevenson referred to the Antonine Wall built by the Romans c.142 CE in Scotland, which briefly marked Rome's northernmost frontier and, like Hadrian's Wall later, was considered by Romans to be the boundary between civilization and barbarism or savagery.[44] In the New World context, Mayor Phelan, like Stevenson, translates an imperial British interpretation of the legacy of Rome and its civilizing mission to America and the shores of the Pacific Ocean. In this translation, America, not England, is the new Rome, and the Pacific Ocean is a new frontier for Americans to cross in order to spread commerce and civilization to the modern Asian barbarian. Tilden accepted the commission, and President Roosevelt dedicated the Dewey Monument (as it was then called) on May 13, 1903. Modeled on the

Figure 6.4 Roman centurion pointing his sword toward the Pacific islands and Asia. Cover of *Sunset Magazine*, December 1910.

rostral columns erected by Romans to celebrate their maritime triumphs, it had the names of the US battleships that had destroyed the Spanish fleet at Manila Bay inscribed on its base.[45]

As the "Rome of the Pacific," San Francisco deserved an appropriately imperial architecture. Mayor Phelan and members of the business community wanted San Francisco rebuilt along neoclassical lines. Daniel Burnham was hired in 1906 to present plans to the city's business community. The design of Burnham's West Coast representative, Willis Polk, shows San Francisco's Nob Hill remade in the image of Rome's Capitoline, with new boulevards slashing through the existing grid below. But Burnham's plans were never realized, and San Francisco became a new Pompeii rather than a new Rome: the city was destroyed by earthquake and fire in 1906 and then rebuilt in haste.

The Imperial Metropolis

New York was the city that celebrated America's imperial destiny with the most enthusiasm, no doubt because New Yorkers knew their city was the commercial and cultural capital of the nation. A lavish public spectacle was held in New York City on September 28–30, 1899, to commemorate Admiral Dewey's victory in Manila Bay. The three-day event featured a parade with over thirty thousand members of the military escorting Dewey and his entourage through the streets of New York. Members of the National Sculpture Society designed a massive Roman triumphal arch through which Admiral Dewey was to pass in a celebration of the emergence of America's overseas empire (figure 6.5).[46] The arch was placed in one of the city's most prominent intersections, where Broadway, Fifth Avenue, and Twenty-Fourth Street meet at Madison Square. The official program for the event hailed the arch with approval: "Nothing could have been more appropriate.

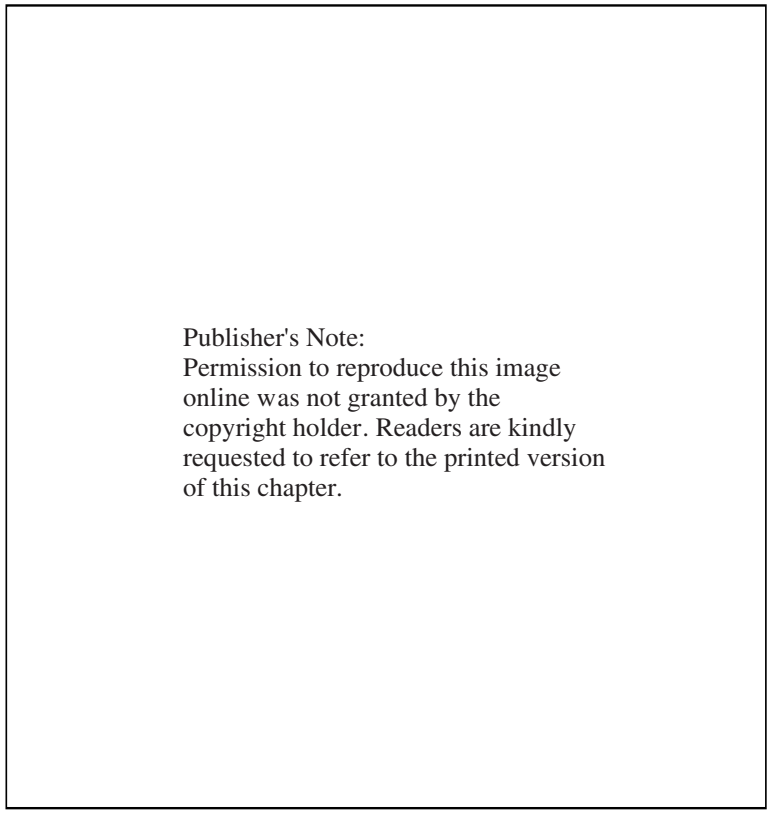
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Figure 6.5 *The Parade in Honor of George Dewey Passes Under the Dewey Arch on September 30, 1899.* Right half of a stereoscopic image. Charles Lamb, principal sculptor; demolished. Courtesy of the Library of Congress's Prints and Photographs Division.

The Romans were masters in their temporary and permanent commemoration of triumphs; other nations have only followed their example."[47] Fifth Avenue was termed the "Appian Way" of New York, and "the fit approach for triumphal processions."[48] The arch was the architectural frame for the parade and it served as a symbolic gateway through which the military units were to pass.

The Dewey Arch was modeled on the Arch of Titus in Rome, which commemorated the sack of Jerusalem by the emperors Vespasian and Titus, and, like the Arch of Titus, the Dewey Arch celebrated conquest. Just as Roman triumphal arches displayed images of the conquerors and conquered on their walls, the Dewey Arch depicted eight prominent naval heroes and territories acquired as a result of the Spanish–American War. Newspapers and the parade's souvenir booklet drew comparisons between Roman triumphs and Dewey's victory parade. "Surely no Roman general, surely no Roman emperor ever received such a tribute from the populace of the Eternal City!" gushed the *New York Times*.[49] Since imperialism was now "the dominant fact in our civilization," Lewis Mumford later explained, it was appropriate that Americans "should stamp the most important monuments and buildings with its image."[50] Roman imperial propaganda was the pattern for these first monuments to the United States' new imperial reach. In the New York of 1899, America's acquisition of an empire was an event to celebrate.

Shortly before the Dewey Victory Parade, the new super-city of Greater New York had been ushered in with great ceremony on New Year's Eve, 1897. Thereafter, Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, and the Bronx were incorporated into a new megalopolis. Photographer and city-booster Moses King classified New York as a cosmopolis, the peer of any city ancient or modern. According to King, New York was "the great mother-city of money," "the paramount city of the Western World, and the center of its commercial and financial activity."[51] Andrew Haswell Green, president of the Greater New York Commission, argued for incorporation, insisting that New York must recognize and accept its imperial destiny and status as a cosmopolis: "Cities are the crowns, the signs, the factors of empire," he said, and the imperial city "wins honorable renown throughout the world which all her colonies may proudly inherit."[52]

As the capital of American commerce and finance, New York's civic buildings dramatized their functions through a celebratory and majestic Roman architecture. McKim, Mead and White's Bowery Savings Bank (1894) enshrined commercial banking in monumental Roman splendor; its temple front was framed with Corinthian columns, and it housed a grand "Roman" room, ringed with marble columns, its walls modeled with tabernacles and swags, that served as the main banking room.[53] Other banks imitated the Bowery Bank's classicism though none matched its lavishness.

New York's train stations were grand ceremonial gateways, signaling arrival in the city. Railroads were the vital arteries of commerce, and the railroad tracks that rapidly spread across the nation were the visible signs of economic conquest. New York's train stations reflected the city's importance as the commercial capital of

the nation, and a suitably bombastic rhetoric accompanied the opening of the new Grand Central Terminal in 1913. The promotional literature located its site as "the center of the city of New York, Metropolis of the Western Hemisphere, and in many respects the 'First City of the World.'"[54] The firms of Reed and Stem and of Warren and Wetmore, the terminal's engineers and architects, created an eclectic Roman style, one influenced by the ornate French neoclassicism popular at the time, but one that also drew directly on imperial Roman buildings for its inspiration. The influence of imperial Roman baths is evident in both the main façade of the terminal station, which contains great arched windows flanked with Roman Doric columns, and the barrel-vaulted ceiling of the main waiting room. Grand Central Terminal suggested the grandeur of imperial Rome. As one passenger put it, while in it "the traveler instinctively looks for white-robed priests and vestal virgins scattering flowers."[55] Its architecture was deemed magnificent, utilitarian, and inspirational – worthy of the great city it served: "It is the strangers' introduction to the great city whose heart-throbs are felt all over the civilized world, and this is a picture worthy of the frame that has been given to it."[56]

The jewel of the new railroad complexes that sprang up across the nation was McKim, Mead and White's stunning Pennsylvania Station, which was formally dedicated on August 1, 1910.[57] The great buildings of imperial Rome inspired Charles Follen McKim's design for the station; he had visited Rome in 1901 and photographed the Baths of Caracalla and the Colosseum, and the design of Pennsylvania Station reflects their influence. The external proportions of the Colosseum with its three storeys and a high attic were translated into the façade of the station and, like the Colosseum, the station had separate entrances and exits at different levels.[58] The general waiting room was modeled on the *tepidarium* (warm bath) of the Roman Baths of Caracalla, and like those Baths (and other imperial Roman buildings) it was sheathed in Travertine marble quarried from the Campagna district in Italy where Romans had obtained marble for their buildings. McKim put a steel and glazed concourse shell next to the grand waiting room, and the juxtaposition of the two spaces, one seemingly ancient and monumental, the other modern and utilitarian, highlighted the continuity of the classical form and its new uses in America.[59] One admirer enthused: "In catching or meeting a train at Penn Station one became part of a pageant – actions and movements gained significance while processing through such grand spaces."[60] Pennsylvania Station's magnificent architectural design and monumental spaces gave the act of meeting or taking a train an elevated meaning.

Symbolically, Roman references endowed the modern commercial metropolis with the importance and stature of imperial Rome. W. Symmes Richardson, who worked at the firm of McKim, Mead and White, commented on the appropriateness of Roman forms for American life at the turn of the century: "The conditions of modern American life, in which undertakings of great magnitude and scale are carried through, involving interests in all parts of the world, are more

nearly akin to the life of the Roman Empire than that of any other civilization."[61] The plaster imperial city of the 1893 Chicago Exposition was now being translated into marble for the citizens of New York City.

Some of the Gilded Age rich in New York and elsewhere made grand philanthropic use of their wealth and became patrons of the arts and learning. A number of America's wealthiest families endowed universities, orchestras, museums, libraries, and opera houses in New York and in other metropolitan areas. Many of these new cultural institutions utilized the architectural language of Rome filtered through the Beaux-Arts movement. McKim, Mead and White's pantheonic designs for the Low Library at Columbia University (1894) and the Gould Memorial Library at the Bronx Campus of New York University (1895–1902) are particularly noteworthy examples of the influence of Roman models on New York's architecture, but that influence can also be seen in the architecture of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, the New York Public Library, and the New York Historical Society.

The taste for Roman-inspired architecture was both a gesture back to colonial and early republican uses of Rome in American architecture and part of a wave of progressive and nationalist fervor that viewed America as the heir to the great civilizations of antiquity and Europe. As Lawrence Levine has pointed out, this cultural identification with Europe marked a significant shift in American views of its cultural relationship to the Old World. For much of the nineteenth century, "Americans did not think of themselves as participants in a common Western civilization," but by the end of the century American architecture and art had incorporated images, symbols, and artifacts of other earlier cultures to assert precisely that.[62] The metaphorical power of architecture as a symbolic system helped bestow upon American culture a genealogy and a legitimacy, placing it at the pinnacle of a trajectory that reached back through the more recent European empires to the Renaissance and ultimately to Greco-Roman antiquity.

An appropriation of and identification with classical and European cultures aided urban elites in fashioning an identity that differentiated them from the waves of immigrants whose teeming presence in New York had upset old hierarchies and lifestyles. One elite response to the fragmentation and disorder of a changed world was "an escape into culture, which became one of the mechanisms that made it possible to identify, distinguish, and order this new universe."[63] The "escape into culture" involved, among other things, the emergence of new cultural hierarchies; and a number of historians have traced the development of categorical and hierarchical differences between "high" and "low" in the field of cultural production.[64] Levine has catalogued the wide popularity of Shakespearean drama, opera, and the fine arts among Americans in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The "sacralization" of these entertainments began during the second half of the nineteenth century, as the institutions and criteria for high culture were developed. The adaptation of the phrenological terms "highbrowed" and "lowbrowed" to the categorization of culture and the classification of tastes provided new cultural

strategies for social control. Arts that had been part of a shared public culture were removed from public enjoyment and the marketplace and put in newly built opera houses, museums, and concert halls built in neoclassical splendor to be enjoyed by those who had the leisure, funds, and knowledge to appreciate them. The taste for Roman references and models in the arts and in the civic and private architecture of New York is emblematic of this new mapping of culture – it added the symbolic weight of authority, tradition, order, and imperial splendor to new cultural hierarchies.

Imperial Pleasures

Beginning in the 1880s, there was a broad shift from the values of production to the values of consumption, a shift that accompanied a movement from an economy organized around work and production to one organized around leisure and consumption. T. J. Jackson Lears has charted the accompanying movement from an ethic of self-discipline and self-control to one of self-gratification and personal pleasure.[65] The competing strands in American culture, between a drive toward productivity complemented by the virtues of self-denial and dreams of effortless abundance, had often been given a Roman face and expressed as a struggle between republican ideals and imperial pleasures. But, in turn-of-the-century New York City, there is little evidence of such a struggle. Imperial pleasures were no longer greeted with opprobrium but instead were increasingly to be celebrated, enjoyed, and displayed. Wealthy elites, the middle classes, and the working classes could consume and enjoy imperial Rome in a variety of ways: in public buildings, commercial enterprises and entertainments, and private homes.

New Yorkers gave Roman shape and form to a number of public facilities, including public baths. Beginning in 1906, increasingly magnificent and lavish public baths were constructed for New York's citizens. Indoor plumbing was a rarity for much of the city's population and public bathing facilities were a hygienic necessity.[66] However, these baths offered more than just bathing facilities: they included swimming pools, open and enclosed areas for games, meeting rooms, and steam rooms. Like ancient Roman baths, a number of New York public baths were designed as social centers as well as hygiene centers. William Aiken and Arnold Brunner's 1906 public baths, for example, occupied a full block site and contained a swimming pool, plunges, Turkish baths, and meeting rooms. The twin arches of the portals, framed by paired Corinthian columns that marked the separate entrances for men and women, allude to the Roman prototype of the modern facility.[67] Most baths were available to New Yorkers for a low fee.

The Fleischman Baths (1908), located near the New York Public Library at Forty-Second Street and Sixth Avenue, was the most opulent and lavish of all the public baths in New York, and its design and decoration explicitly invoked the great imperial Roman baths. Fleischman's recreated the luxury and magnificence

of ancient Roman baths for the enjoyment of well-to-do New Yorkers, and its publicity material cited the Baths of Diocletian as the model for its own magnificence:

> The people of ancient Rome lavished the revenues of the State in the construction of magnificent bathing institutions, which contained not only baths but gymnasiums, libraries, and in some instances theaters. The Baths of Diocletian contained 3,200 marble seats for the use of bathers, and were adorned with exquisite mosaics, classic columns and the rarest pieces of statuary. The Fleischman Baths are a modern adaptation of the famous baths of imperial Rome. [68]

The cost for admission was one dollar, which was a hefty entrance fee: in 1908 a loaf of bread cost 5 cents and the average yearly salary for all industry workers (excluding farm laborers) was 564 dollars.

The inscription on the entrance or *antelarium* to the baths conflated Dante and imperial Rome: "Abandon care all ye who enter here and do as the Romans did." Fleischman's pampered its customers, who were surrounded by luxurious ways to indulge themselves. The "Roman" facilities included a *tepidarium*, a *calidarium* (hottest room in the sequence of baths), a steam room, a *natatorium* or plunge pool, a shampooing room with marble compartments where bathers were scrubbed and scraped, gymnasia, dressing rooms furnished with divans, a massage room for rubs with oils and perfumes, and pedicure and manicure departments.[69] The designers adorned the complex with marble pillars, mosaic floors, fountains, and replicas of classical statuary, and its walls were frescoed with Roman scenes. The result resembled the enticing marble Roman baths painted by Lawrence Alma-Tadema in 1909 (figures 6.6 and 6.7). The Diocletian Club Room, an exclusive club that provided valet service and round-the-clock services for those able to pay an extra annual fee, was located at the top of the building.

Members of the Diocletian Club (and other privileged elites) could, if they wished, continue their Roman experience into the evening and dine at Murray's Roman Gardens (1907), designed by Henry Erkins and located on Forty-Second Street between Seventh and Eighth Avenues in Manhattan.[70] Murray's publicity material billed the Roman Gardens as a reproduction of a luxurious Pompeiian villa (Pompeii was considered "the Newport of Rome") during the rule of Nero, the time of Rome's "greatest opulence and magnificence"; and its promoters claimed that it was built "for the pleasure and delectation of the people in the one city in the new world, where such luxury and elegance are likely to find appreciation."[71] The Manhattan Roman-themed restaurant anticipated Caesars Palace in Las Vegas in the lavish and meticulous attention it devoted to creating a sumptuous pleasure palace for imperial entertainments and ostentatious consumption.

Murray's atrium or interior court served as the main dining area. Under a sky-blue ceiling lighted with electric stars and within walls festooned with vines and foliage, it contained as a centerpiece a huge fountain surmounted by a temple on

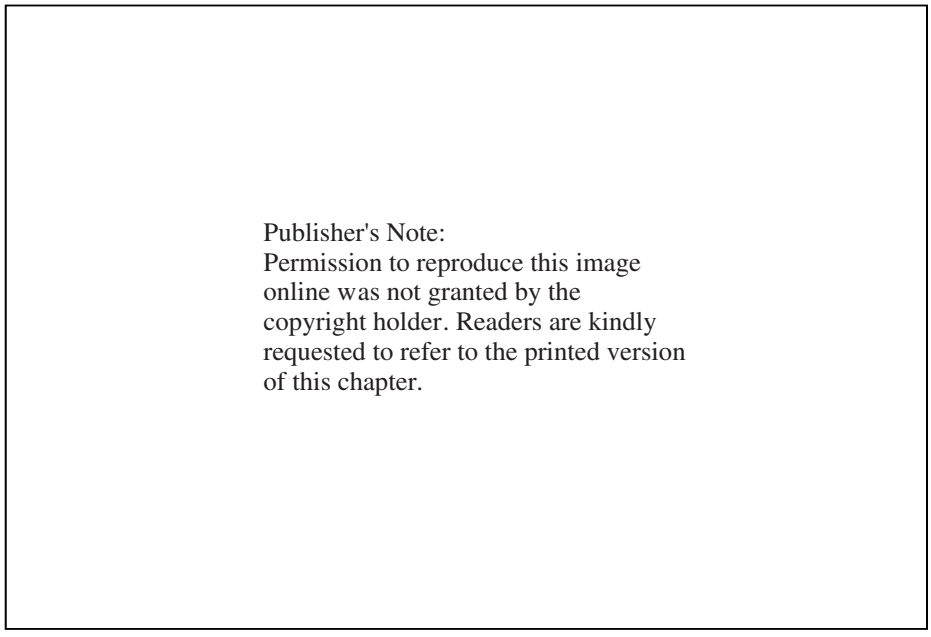
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Figure 6.6 Advertisement for the Fleischman Baths, 1908. *Natatorium* decorated with lavish Roman details, demolished. In *The Fleischman Baths: Bryant Park Building, Forty-Second St. & Sixth Ave., New York City* New York: Gudé-Bayer Co., 1908.

a Roman barge (figure 6.8). Fountains, palm trees, frescoes of views of the Bay of Naples, Roman sculpture and statuary, and marble and mosaic pavements adorned the dining area. Private dining rooms were located on the second floor, including one from "the period of Antony and Cleopatra" that contained a fresco of the Egyptian queen gazing from a balcony out over the landscape. There was also a fresco of the famous temple of Isis at Pompeii, displaying a nude woman playing a lute, and a devotee of Isis worshiping with upraised hands. Guests could proceed from this room to the Pompeian Garden where palm trees, statuary, and two magnificent marble and mosaic fountains designed by Stanford White for the 1893 Columbian Exposition were displayed.

The design and atmosphere of Murray's Roman Gardens drew heavily on the rich detail in Edward Bulwer-Lytton's novel *The Last Days of Pompeii*. Bulwer-Lytton's novel had also inspired painters such as Lawrence Alma-Tadema to illustrate some of its fictive scenes, so advertising for Murray's Roman Gardens was able to claim that it brought to life the villas described in Lytton's novel and in Alma-Tadema's paintings. A patron of Murray's "can feast his eyes on an artistic and authentically exact reproduction of the most beautiful features of Pompeii's most ornate homes, of the palaces, villas and pleasure resorts of her wealthiest and most cultured citizens, such as Bulwer-Lytton so entrancingly describes."[72] Whereas on the narrative level Bulwer-Lytton's novel condemned Roman consumption and

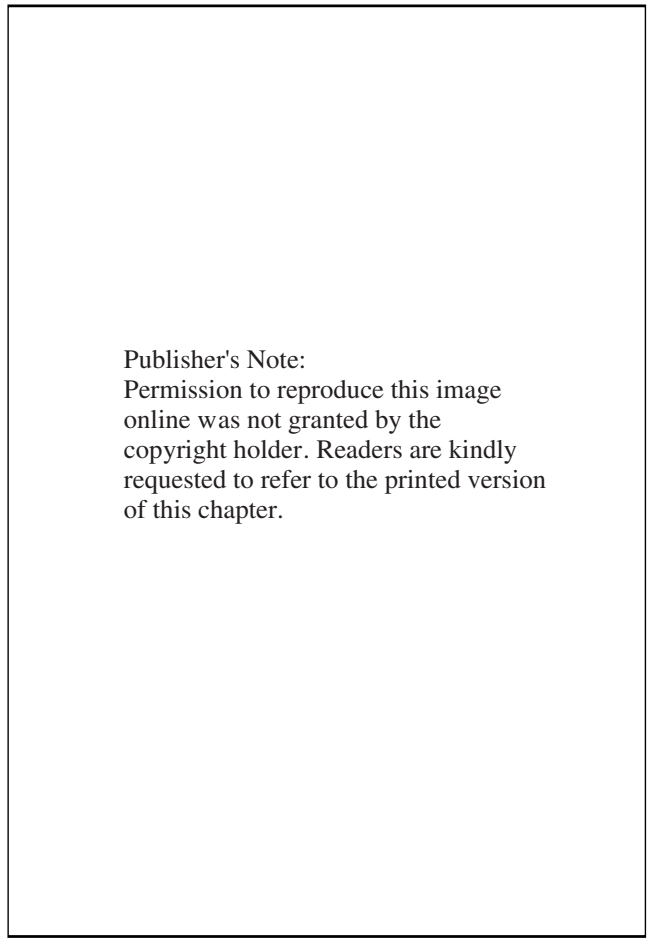
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Figure 6.7 Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *A Favorite Custom*, 1909. Tate Gallery, London, Great Britain. Photo Credit: Tate Gallery, London/Art Resource, NY.

indulgence, Murray's Roman Gardens sought to bring it to life for the pleasure of modern New Yorkers.

At Murray's patrons were "transported" to a sumptuous imperial Rome when they crossed the threshold. Erkins sought to recreate the Rome of the Caesars, the period when "Rome reached its zenith of wealth and luxury."[73] The restaurant created a villa, in the words of its publicity material, "such as a Roman general would build on return from his conquests, replete with various trophies of victories."[74] Murray's Roman Gardens was patronized by New York's wealthy elites and it provided them a venue where they could enjoy emulating the imagined lifestyles of their imperial Roman predecessors or their British contemporaries (figure 6.9). Murray's also offered bachelor accommodation in Pompeian style,

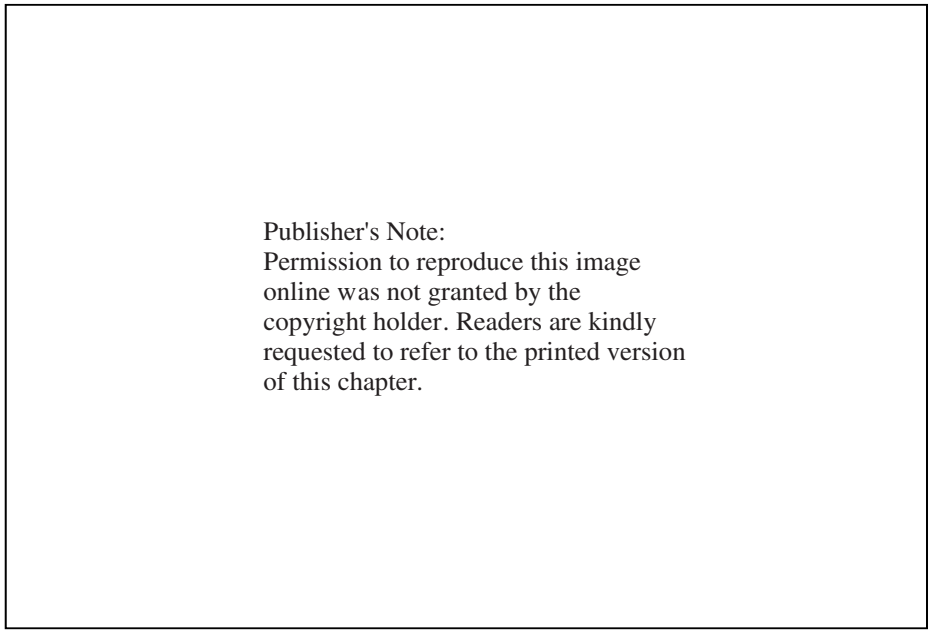
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Figure 6.8 Henry Erkins, Murray's Roman Gardens, main dining room, 1907, demolished. *New York Plaisance: An Illustrated Series of New York Places of Amusement*, no. 1 (New York, 1908).

perhaps modeled after Bulwer-Lytton's description of the house of his Athenian hero, Glaucus, which Bulwer-Lytton claimed "would be a model at this day for the house of 'a single man at Mayfair.'"[75] Murray's publicity advertised an environment that was "synonymous with artistic taste and unrivalled elegance, the storehouse for all that was precious and beautiful in the world that the Romans knew, conquered and plundered."[76] The Rome constructed at the simulated villa signifies and legitimates ancient and modern opulence, imperial conquest, and privilege.

Novi homines ("new men") in Rome and America loved display, glitter, and color. As the new men of Rome in Cicero's day plundered Egypt and Greece of their treasures, so the American plutocracy ransacked the palaces, churches, castles, and monasteries of Europe for paintings, statuary, rugs, wood carvings, and furniture for their New York palaces and Newport "cottages." European tutors were imported to teach the new men, and their wives and children, etiquette, music, and appreciation of culture, much as Greek preceptors had served Roman families in the time of Cicero. European artists designed and decorated for New York homes, as Greek artists had been commanded to decorate the homes of the newly rich in ancient Rome.

New York elites were well known for hosting dinners worthy of the ostentatious displays of wealth and consumption of Trimalchio, the freed slave of Petronius'

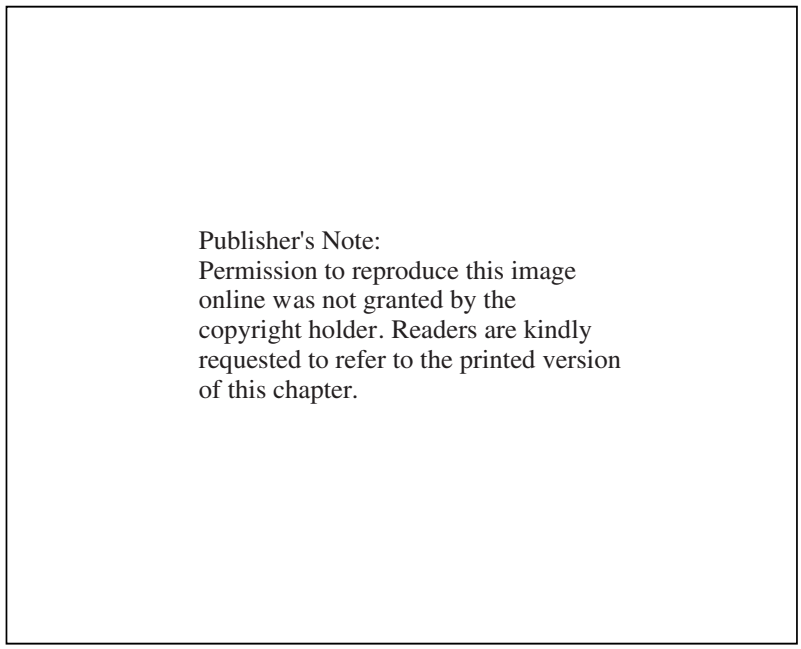
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Figure 6.9 Henry Erkins, Murray's Roman Gardens, looking out at the Bay of Naples, interior decoration, 1907, demolished. *New York Plaisance: An Illustrated Series of New York Places of Amusement*, no. 1 (New York, 1908).

Satyricon. At a dinner given by C. K. G. Billings in March 1903, known as the "Horseback Dinner," Sherry's restaurant in Manhattan refitted its grand ballroom for 36 guests and their horses.[77] The guests ate on horseback on miniature tables attached to the pommels of saddles, and were served by waiters dressed as grooms at a hunting party. Saddle bags equipped with rubber tubes dispensed champagne, and elaborate oat-filled feeding troughs were set out for the horses, which dined after their riders were finished. At another dinner party guests dined near a 30-foot long ornamental pool containing four swans, and discovered black pearls placed in their oysters. At still another party, human goldfish swam in ornamental pools and chorus girls hopped out of pies. The diners occasionally made their identification with and emulation of the elites of the classical world explicit. In a photograph of a dinner given by or for Harrison Grey Fiske in the winter of 1900–1, the black-tuxedoed dinner guests, shown relaxing after dinner with brandy and cigars, are crowned with laurel wreathes signifying their victorious status and privileged positions (figure 6.10).[78]

The flamboyant life and career of architect Stanford White is emblematic of the imperialist mood and the tastes and practices of the era. White designed numerous public buildings in Roman or Renaissance style, and he also designed homes and clubs for the Gilded Age rich, helping to translate vulgar capital into cultural

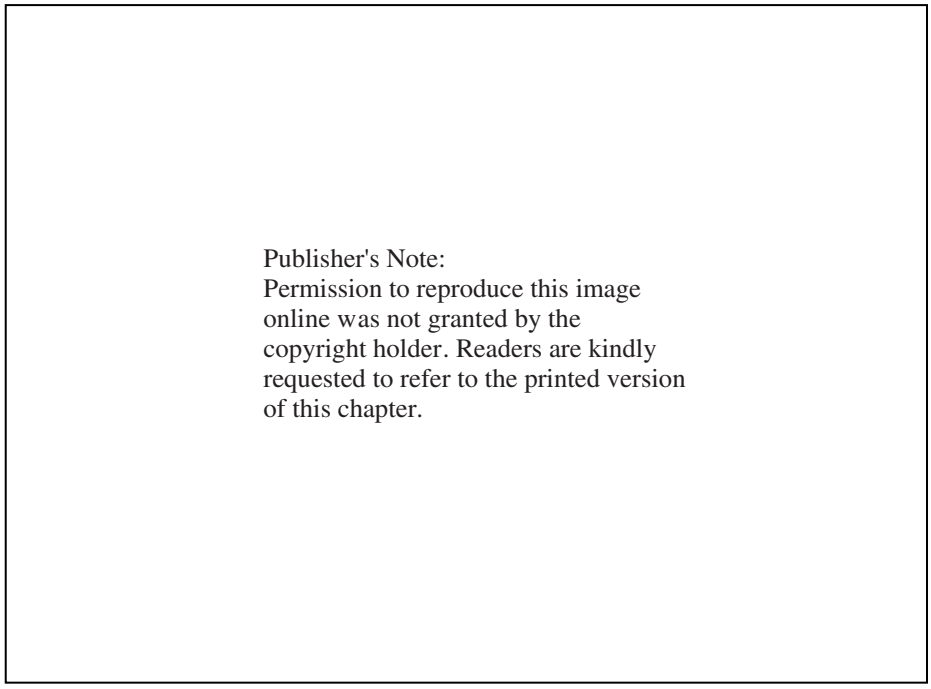
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Figure 6.10 Joseph Byron, *Harrison Grey Fiske Dinner*, 1900–1. Courtesy of the City Museum of New York.

capital. He shamelessly looted Europe to design palaces for the robber barons, "stripping Italian palazzi not only of their objects but their ceilings, their mosaics, their very door jambs and window frames."[79] Thinking of the Romans, Henry James referred to the loot as the "spoils" of civilization, and Thorstein Veblen called them "trophies."[80] White saw nothing wrong with this imperial process; with antiquity as his example, he claimed that it was the right of an ascendant nation to appropriate the treasures of civilization: "In the past dominant nations had always plundered works of art from their predecessors . . . America was taking a leading place among nations and had, therefore, the right to obtain art wherever she could."[81] White's obsession with collecting and incorporating the artifacts of other cultures into his architectural creations reflected the tastes of the age of empire.

White's acquisitive desire for beautiful objects was echoed in his desire to possess and consume women. His most notorious affair was with Evelyn Nesbit, a dancer and actress, who was 16 when they first met. Family legend has it that White enjoyed acting out fantasies of Roman debauchery with Nesbit. According to Suzannah Lessard, White's great-granddaughter: "Sometimes when she and Stanford were in the loft with the red velvet swing Stanford would dress up in a toga and put Evelyn naked on his shoulder, pick up a big bunch of grapes, and

then, looking at their image in the mirrors, march around the loft, singing at the top of his lungs."[82]

Popular magazines, novels, and paintings of the era reveal a fascination with the luxurious material culture of the Roman world, with the textures, fabrics, furniture, and interiors of imperial Rome, and a curiosity about the "everyday life" of the Romans. Lawrence Alma-Tadema painted with meticulous detail the material splendor and imagined domestic life of ancient Rome.[83] His domestic interiors captured on canvas the marble, fabrics, jewelry, flowers, decorative arts, and furniture of ancient Greece and Rome. The objects were archaeologically correct – Alma-Tadema visited Pompeii twice and had a library full of books on archaeology – but the men and women in his paintings resembled his English contemporaries, which led critics to call them "Victorians in togas." Industrialists on both sides of the Atlantic loved his work – many of his paintings ended up in America, where the Carnegies, Vanderbilts, Walters, and other newly rich families paid huge sums for them.

As technologies of reproduction increased in sophistication, reproductions of Roman (and Greek) luxury objects and art became available for purchase by the middle classes. Magazines told women how to decorate the home and how objects from different historical periods could best be displayed, including how to create a Roman mosaic and the Pompeian style for one's home.[84] Companies churned out mass-produced Roman lamps, columns and capitals, and other domestic paraphernalia for the consumption of the middle classes. Henry Erkins, the designer of Murray's Roman Gardens restaurant, for example, had a studio that specialized in the reproduction of classical columns, Roman-styled chairs and lamps, fountains, wall brackets and candelabras, mosaic floors, and American copies of Roman copies of Greek statues for the garden. The middle classes could buy for their mantelpieces and parlors copies of the *Winged Victory*, or of Greek vases and other objects found in Roman Pompeii, and they could design their gardens after Roman gardens in Pompeii.[85] In 1893 Alexander von Wagner painted a panoramic picture, *The Chariot Race*, which was quickly converted into a popular engraving to hang in homes and schoolrooms.[86] Middle-class admirers of Alma-Tadema's paintings could purchase reproductions in lithographic, chromolith, or photogravure form to hang in their homes. Some of Alma-Tadema's paintings even inspired women's fashion: satin dresses "à la Tadema" were popular in London and America, where women wore "Tadema togas." Women's magazines featured articles on "Roman costumes" where Roman matrons' dress and toiletry were described. In "Classic hints for modern costumes" women were advised that Kate Greenaway dresses "make easy the transition to the *stola*, or the girdled outer robe of the Roman woman. One of the most picturesque figures at Newport last summer . . . was in such a dress."[87] The author recommended Madras muslin for experimenting because it was soft, thin, and supple.

The availability of reproductions allowed the middle classes to imitate the practices of wealthy elites and acquire, and decorate their homes with, the artifacts of

empire. Copies of Greek vases or busts of Cicero in the parlor signified cultural enrichment. In contrast to the eighteenth century's association of classicism with austerity, restraint, and civic virtue, now reproductions of classical art in homes proclaimed the owner's elevated taste, knowledge of history and art, and individual achievements in the world.[88]

While New York's elites indulged in private fantasies of Roman imperial pleasures, and built neoclassical buildings to house art treasures from ancient and European cultures for their own enjoyment and the improvement of the populace, entertainment entrepreneurs like Phineas T. Barnum and Bolossy and Imre Kiralfy constructed spaces for the performance of events, loosely based on popular images of the imperial Roman world, for the pleasure of the working classes. For a small fee, thousands of New Yorkers enjoyed the supposed entertainments of the ancient Romans at the circus, at stage-spectacles, and at the amusement parks of Coney Island. These events offered patrons spectacles of imperial cruelty and decadence and other forms of "Roman" entertainments with no pretensions of moral improvement. Instead of uplift, the circuses and stage-spectacles created spaces for the performance of allegories of imperial power and spectacles of colossal Roman excesses in the form of mass entertainment.

Circuses capitalized on their distant link to Roman circuses. Many boasted that they were animating the Circus Maximus of ancient Rome; one circus poster boldly proclaimed: "Ancient Roman Hippodrome. A glorious picture of the Eternal City under the Caesars, reproducing with startling realism the sports, gladiatorial displays, and thrilling races of the Circus Maximus."[89] Madison Square Garden, once called the Great Roman Hippodrome, offered a variety of entertainments, including light operas, romantic comedies, and P. T. Barnum's and John Ringling's circuses.[90] The "Roman" entertainments performed at these circuses included acts like the Octavian Troupe, 16 Roman soldiers and athletes who performed "the sports, games, combats and tournaments of classic days. An historically correct representation of the thrilling scenes of the Caesarian period."[91] Chariot races, living statues, tableaux of mythological figures and events (such as Hercules, the Apollo Trio, the Seven Sapphos), gladiatorial combat, and acrobats dressed as Romans who juggled "Roman axes" were popular at a variety of circuses (figure 6.11). Cleopatra often made an appearance in circus tableaux and in circus street parades, a form of advertising held on the morning before the grand opening of the circus designed to entice people to come to the show. Adam Forepaugh's 1889 circus street parade, for example, displayed the Egyptian queen reclining on a colossal decorated barge that was pulled through the street by six plumed horses.

Spectacular stage productions were one of the most popular forms of entertainment in late nineteenth-century America. Stage-spectacles took elements of Victorian theater and some of its melodramatic themes and reproduced them in gigantic spaces for thousands of people. Enormous in scale and size, these productions featured elaborate scenery and hundreds of singers, dancers, and actors in extravagant costume who mimed the drama to orchestral accompaniment. The

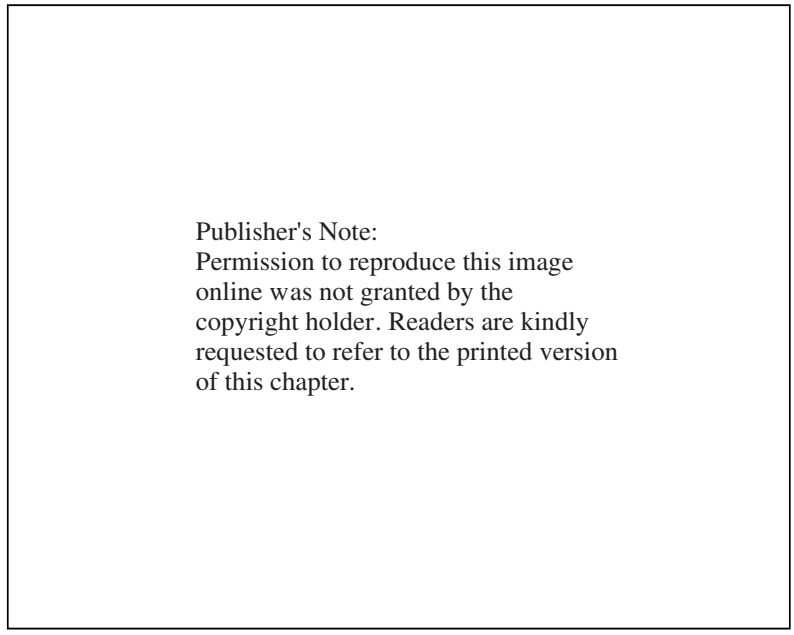
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Figure 6.11 Circus poster advertising Roman entertainments, c.1890s. Courtesy of the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

most successful stage-spectacles of the era were produced by Imre and Bolossy Kiralfy, who were the undisputed masters of the medium.[92]

The two brothers along with other members of their family had emigrated from Hungary to New York in 1869. All members of the family were involved in dance, and in the 1870s Imre and Bolossy began producing shows.[93] They understood the American immigrant audience's need for affordable entertainment, its desire for visual spectacle, and the advantages of mimed action, which solved the potential problem of the multiplicity of languages. In 1887 Imre built an outdoor theater on Staten Island where he staged his *Nero, or the Destruction of Rome. Nero* was produced on a lavish scale and was first performed, to great acclaim, in 1888.

Advertising for *Nero* said it was a "gigantic, historical, biblical, dramatic and musical spectacle," and like other Kiralfy productions, it combined dance, music, visual spectacle, and mimed action. The plot draws on the images of a cruel and decadent Rome prevalent in Victorian novels, in "toga" plays, popular from the 1880s on, and in Jean-Léon Gérôme's popular paintings of gladiatorial combats and Christians martyred in Roman arenas (see figure 4.2 above). The performance featured gladiatorial combats, an imperial orgy, Nero's attempted seduction of an innocent Christian girl, Christians burned as human torches in the arena, Christians thrown to the wild beasts in the arena, and Nero's burning of Rome. The drama

ends with Nero's death and the dawning of Christianity, signaled by angels appearing to transport the martyred Christians to heaven.

P. T. Barnum saw *Nero* and was so impressed that he immediately contacted Imre Kiralfy and asked him if he would be interested in shortening *Nero* into a "circus spec" and joining him with it on tour in London. Kiralfy agreed and the collaboration of the two popular entertainers marked a breakthrough in circus entertainment. Whereas before circuses offered multiple separate entertainments, now they began to offer narrative spectacles on popular topics. Kiralfy's *Nero* became a part of Barnum and Bailey's *Greatest Show on Earth* and it reached hundreds of thousands of people, first on tour in London and then in New York and across America.

As early as 1889, the Barnum and Bailey circus referred to itself as "a stupendous mirror of departed empires."[94] Taking Roman emperors as a model, circus entrepreneurs provided spectacular entertainments; they made the "pastimes of the Caesars" available to masses of people and offered "a millionaire vision for even the poorest child."[95] The Roman pastimes the entertainment entrepreneurs created for the pleasures of their audiences were based on those depicted in popular novels and paintings. Americans were fascinated by blood in the arena, the titillating and decadent pastimes of the Roman elites, and the colossal material splendor of the era. The covers for many circus souvenir booklets and the advertising posters for *Nero* reproduced Jean-Léon Gérôme's paintings of Roman arena events (figures 6.12 and 6.13). Circus attendees were not at all disturbed by any moral consideration of the events in the arena. Audiences could enjoy the spectacle without having to take a position on whether or not to condemn Nero.

In creating a miniature imperial Rome some of the glory of that era devolved onto the circus itself and its modern re-creators; as Bailey said about his *Greatest Show on Earth* in the lavish souvenir program for the 1890 production:

> It is one of the nineteenth century's most colossal and magnificent achievements . . . to exhibit Rome, as she appeared in the zenith of her architectural, imperial, warlike, colossal, civic and festal splendors two thousand years ago. We do this, and with a majesty, perfection and superbness that would have amazed and captivated Nero himself.[96]

Barnum and Bailey's lavish entertainments thus claimed to rival and even to supersede the imperial spectacles once provided by Roman emperors. Similarly, a language of imperial power was employed to describe the success of the circus's "victory" and "triumph" in London: "*Nero* the new, transcendent dramatic spectacle which reigned triumphant and resplendent in London for over two hundred performances."[97] One circus poster has circus performers proceeding in triumph through the Dewey Arch (figure 6.14). Barnum boasted in a letter to his circus audiences that his show was so popular in London that he could "truthfully exclaim '*Veni, vidi, vici.*'"[98] Like Caesar (and later Cecil B. DeMille), Barnum had the

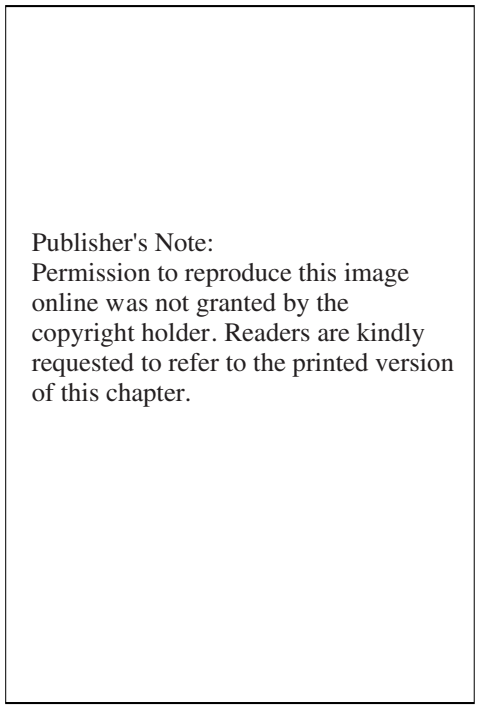
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Figure 6.12 Cover for Barnum and Bailey's *Greatest Show on Earth* souvenir booklet, 1890, reproducing Jean-Léon Gérôme's *Pollice Verso*, 1872. Photograph of the cover of souvenir booklet by Margaret Malamud.

skills necessary to organize, supervise, and direct masses of people and animals. After all, it was no easy task to re-create imperial Rome under a circus tent. One circus fan said: "one is lost in admiration of the masterful generalship, the enormous labor, and the infinite care bestowed upon details . . . all going forward with the regularity and apparent ease of clockwork."[99] At a banquet given in Barnum's honor at the Hotel Victoria in London, the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* suggested that Barnum ranked with Caesar himself or even Alexander the Great. "After all, are not the great men of all ages showmen? Was not Julius Caesar, when he crossed the Rubicon . . . was not he a showman? Was not Alexander the Great a showman when he burned Persepolis, with a magnificent display of ten thousand additional lamps?"[100]

Not only did Barnum appropriate the language of imperial victory for himself and his circus, he also conflated his achievements with those of the American nation. He referred to himself as both a conqueror and a diplomatic envoy from America: he went to England, he said, "representing the Republic in amusement," and returned "triumphant to his native land," wearing "the brightest laurels the old world could bestow."[101] In Barnum's bombastic rhetoric, nationalism, patriotism, and the circus are conflated: "We went as Americans; we respectfully asked for

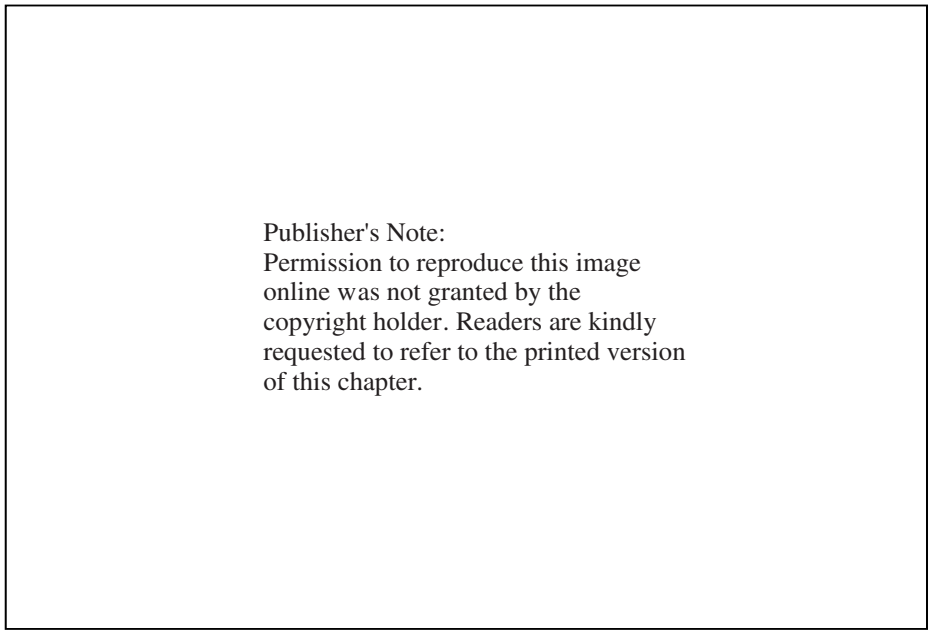
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Figure 6.13 *Gladiators in the Roman Arena: Spectators Are Giving the "Thumbs Down," Signaling the Victor Not to Spare His Defeated Adversary*, after 1872. Print after Jean-Léon Gérôme's 1872 painting *Pollice Verso*. HIP/Art Resource, NY.

recognition as Americans; and we won squarely on American merit."[102] The victory obtained was the recognition and admiration of the British public for the unsurpassable entertainments he and America provided the citizens of the Old World. Barnum's triumph in London demonstrated, he claimed, "a pretty fair sample of American progress, for it proves itself at least one hundred years ahead of the kind Europe can produce."[103] Americans had once again defeated the British, and proved American superiority.

Coney Island, another New York amusement center, also featured Roman-inspired entertainments. It offered an exhilarating antidote to nearby New York City. During the summer months, millions of urban workers escaped to Coney Island, where a carnival atmosphere prevailed, and the normal structures and rules governing social behavior were temporarily suspended.[104] The architecture of Coney Island's three amusement parks was wildly eclectic: minarets, towers, domes, stucco, gilding, paint, and garishness. At night, the scene was dazzling: a fairyland of electric lights. Like the amusement areas of the World's Fairs (which had been the inspiration for Coney's designers), Coney Island offered an array of fantasy environments, entertainments, and pyro-dramas, including Roman chariot races and re-enactments of the destruction of Pompeii.

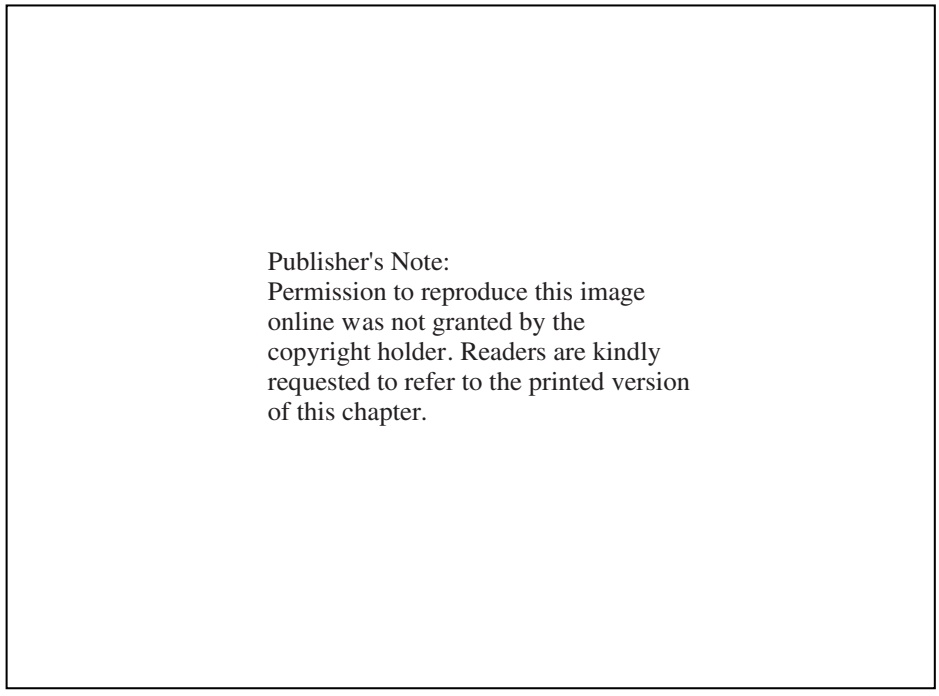
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Figure 6.14 Circus poster of circus performers passing under the Dewey Triumphal Arch, c.1899–1900. Courtesy of the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

The amusement parks were most popular with immigrants, out-of-towners, and New York's working classes, "the very groups that artists and City Beautifiers targeted for socialization and edification through public art."[105] Coney Island had no didactic pretensions; indeed its architecture and sculpture provided a "parodic commentary" on the aims and ideals of proponents of the City Beautiful movement.[106] At the heart of Dreamland, one of the amusement parks, stood a Beaux-Arts-shaped horseshoe organized around a lagoon. Its composition deliberately recalled but playfully subverted the majestic vision of the Court of Honor at the Chicago Exposition and the Electric Tower at the 1901 Pan American Exposition in Buffalo. Chariot races were staged around the sunken plaza ringing the horseshoe, and its mock triumphal arches were adorned with clowns, pierrots, and masks.[107]

If Murray's Roman Gardens recreated the ritzy Pompeii of wealthy Romans for the enjoyment of New York elites, nearby at Manhattan Beach on Coney Island that same Pompeii was destroyed by a fiery cataclysm in nightly performances of James Pain's pyro-drama *The Last Days of Pompeii*.[108] This was an abbreviated rendition of the novel, and performances of it were held in July and August, where

as many as 10,000 spectators gathered to watch it nightly. Bonfires and firework displays created the effect of an eruption, the flow of lava, and the burning of the city. Visitors to Coney Island could also experience the destruction of Pompeii at Dreamland. One of its buildings took the form of a classical temple, and its front was decorated with Charles Shean's fresco of the Bay of Naples with the dormant volcano in the background. Inside, patrons could witness the eruption of Vesuvius, which was realized with scenic and mechanical equipment and an extraordinary electric display.

In Bulwer-Lytton's 1834 novel, the city and its luxury-loving citizens had represented the dark side of empire, its decadent and oppressive face. Louisa Medina's 1835 melodramatic production of *The Last Days of Pompeii* had turned this into a moral, even apocalyptic spectacle.[109] Now, in turn-of-the-century New York, the contrast between the poverty of the working-class populations in their tenements and the imperial splendor of the civic architecture and the private mansions and retreats of the wealthy elites was even greater than it had been in the 1830s. Yet, in Pain's pyro-drama the unbearable conditions of metropolitan life were transformed into fiery entertainment. Negative images of the decadence and cruelty of imperial Rome had been domesticated, losing their moralizing critique of the dangers of indulgence and being transformed into consumable goods, mass spectacles, and entertainments for the pleasure of the citizens of New York.

Imperial Amnesia

How America's imagined relationship with ancient Rome was re-articulated to celebrate empire, wealth, and power is a fascinating but buried moment in the history of America's identification with ancient Rome. Americans have a tendency to deny a desire for or an active role in the acquisition of empire. In an article reviewing a Public Broadcasting Service documentary on the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt (1901–9), Matthew Jacobson noted that Roosevelt's enthusiastic support of American imperial expansion is elided in the documentary, and this elision evinces what he calls "imperial amnesia."[110] Jacobson makes the important point that popular histories of Roosevelt's presidency and analyses of the significance of the Spanish–American War frequently obscure the fact that many Americans consciously chose and enjoyed imperial power. But as we have just seen, Chicago's White City, the coast-to-coast celebrations of Admiral Dewey's victory in the Philippines, and the popularity of imperial-Roman-inspired architecture, monuments, and entertainments in New York City and across the nation reveal that, at the turn of the twentieth century, many Americans *liked* having an empire.[111] Many members of the public now believed that the United States was historically unique and hence not subject to the rule of decline. America would not repeat Rome's trajectory because manifest destiny, now fully aligned with Christianity, made America's empire a virtuous, divinely guided empire. America

became in the popular mind the great nation that would achieve the destiny promised to Rome in Virgil's *Aeneid*: *imperium sine fine*, "empire without end."[112] With no fear of decline, the pleasures of empire could now be consumed and enjoyed by all citizens.

Notes

1 The literature on the 1893 Columbian Exposition is vast. For an annotated bibliography of works on the Columbian Exposition see Bertuca, Hartman, and Neumeister (1996). The following works have been of particular help to me: Appelbaum (1980); H. H. Bancroft (1893); Burg (1976); Harris, de Wit, and Gilbert (1993); Mumford (1955); and Rydell (1984).

2 Richard Morris Hunt designed the Administration Building; the firm of McKim, Mead and White did the Agricultural Building; the firm of Van Brunt and Howe designed the Electricity Building; Adler and Sullivan did the Transportation Building; Charles Atwood designed the Terminal Station, the Fine Arts Building, and the Peristyle; Frederick Law Olmsted was in charge of landscape architecture; and Augustus Saint-Gaudens was the consultant for sculpture.

3 Quoted in Harris (1997), 19.

4 Wheeler (1893), 836.

5 Charles Atwood's Peristyle featured a series of 48 Corinthian columns, one for each of America's states and territories, and an immense triumphal arch. On top of the arch was Columbus in a Roman chariot, and carved above the arch were the names of other conquerors and explorers of the New World. Corinthian columns flanked McKim, Mead and White's Agricultural Building, the dome was crowned with Augustus Saint-Gaudens's 19-foot statue of the Roman goddess Diana, and most of its sculpture and painted decoration were inspired by Roman references.

6 And "There was no place in the modern world so magnificent, so imperial in its beauty." Barr Ferree quoted in Burg (1976), 396.

7 Adams described the White City as "a plaster actualization of the American quest to create a New Jerusalem, a utopian 'City on a Hill' in the New World wilderness." Adams in Bertuca et al. (1994), xix. See also Rydell (1984), 38–40.

8 Burnham quoted in Mumford (1955), 67.

9 Quoted in Harris (1997), 19.

10 Barker (1994), 173.

11 H. Adams (1918), 339. Further quotations will be cited parenthetically in the text.

12 *Aeneid* VIII. 347–69. Virgil's "palimpsestic view of the city": Edwards (1996), 31.

13 Edwards (1996), 31–40

14 H. H. Bancroft (1893), 101–2.

15 For Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show, see White (1994).

16 See Rydell (1984), 95.

17 Rydell (1984) describes the 1898 Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition at Omaha at 111; 115–16; 120–3.

18 The scripting of the battles to showcase the "savagery" of non-whites also served to legitimate their conquest

19 French (1898), 613. This seems an example of what in other colonial contexts Rosaldo has termed "imperialist nostalgia" by which he means the display by colonialists of a nostalgia or melancholia for the loss of indigenous forms of culture that they themselves have destroyed. Rosaldo (1989).
20 Mumford (1955), 60–1.
21 Turner (1893, 1966).
22 Senator Cullom quoted in de Riencourt (1957), 194.
23 Slotkin (1992), 79–87.
24 As Slotkin put it: "The Wild West's conflation of the Frontier Myth and the new ideology of imperialism was fully achieved in 1899 when 'Custer's Last Fight' was replaced by the 'Battle of San Juan Hill'." (1992), 82.
25 On the coding of Filipinos as American Indians, Rydell points out that the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition located a Philippine Reservation, a 47-acre site containing 1,200 Filipinos, next to the American Indian Reservation. The juxtaposition reveals that the two peoples had been placed in the same category as culturally and racially inferior and in need of enlightenment and civilization. Rydell (1984), 124–5.
26 First published in *McClure's Magazine* 12/4 in 1899.
27 Plans for advertising the Exposition included "novel and attractive exhibits of the material resources, products, industries, manufactures, architecture, art, types of native people and illustrations of the present state of the civilization of the islands of the sea recently acquired by the United States." Rydell (1984), 124.
28 Beveridge (1900).
29 Sandburg (1994), "Chicago," 1. The poem was first published in 1914.
30 Adams, "What a Great City Might Be – A Lesson from the White City." In S. H. Smith and Dawson (2000), 393.
31 See the collection of essays in Brooklyn Museum (1979).
32 See the discussion in Stern, Gilmartin, and Massengale (1983), 11–25.
33 See the discussion in Levine (1988), 169–242.
34 The key characteristics of City Beautiful design plans included neoclassical architecture, grand avenues, green spaces, massive buildings and civic centers, and a unity of design and scale.
35 The use of classical architectural models for American buildings was not new in the late nineteenth century. Federalist architecture in particular had employed Roman forms for American buildings, and Thomas Jefferson's designs for the University of Virginia and the Virginia state capital are two examples of the early American interest in Roman architecture. Emulation of Rome had included a taste for its architecture. On September 30, 1785, Thomas Jefferson wrote to James Madison and Edmund Randolph and expressed his desire to instruct and improve the taste of the nation through providing good architecture. "How is a taste in this beautiful art to be formed in our countrymen," he wrote, "unless we avail ourselves of every occasion when public buildings are to be erected, of presenting . . . models for . . . study and imitation?" To that end, Jefferson had the Virginia state capital in Richmond designed after a Roman temple located in Nîmes, France, which he had admired while serving as minister to the French in the 1780s. Jefferson's designs for the University of Virginia, and for his own home, Monticello, as well as his expressed preferences for Roman architecture and symbols helped make the nation's capital's

architectural style Roman. That the capital of the new republic aspired to be Roman amused the visiting Irish poet, Thomas Moore: "In fancy now beneath the twilight gloom, / Come, let me lead thee o'er this 'second Rome,' / Where tribunes rule, where dusky Davi bow, / And what was Goose Creek once is Tiber now / This embryo capital, where Fancy sees / Squares in morasses, obelisks in trees." Jefferson and Federalist architects, however, admired and invoked the Roman Republic rather than imperial Rome. Brownell (1999), 316–17; and (verses 9–14) of a satirical poem "From the City of Washington" by the Irish poet Thomas Moore, who spent four months in America in 1804.

36 See the discussions of this poem in chapters 1 and 5.

37 Brechin (1999), 8–9; 15.

38 Braden (1899).

39 Phelan and Craig quoted in Brechin (1999), 133.

40 Cover of *Sunset Magazine* (December, 1910), reproduced in Brechin (1999), 148. An illustration in *Sunset Magazine* of the seal of the state of California features a Roman centurion at watch by the shores of the Golden Gate Bay. *Sunset Magazine* (1905) 14: 489.

41 "Roman triumphal pageants," *San Francisco Chronicle* (August 20, 1899). See the discussion in Brechin (1999), 19–20; 145–6. Philadelphia staged a celebration to commemorate victory in the Spanish–American War featuring a triumphal Roman arch and rows of large, white columns beneath which the ceremonial parade passed. Hines (1991), 85.

42 Brechin (1999), 145.

43 James Duval Phelan to Douglas Tilden, August 10, 1901, quoted in Brechin (1999), 147. This passage is in Stevenson and Osbourne (1892; rpt 1982), 124–5.

44 The Antonine Wall was abandoned after 20 years when the Roman army withdrew from Scotland in 164.

45 Brechin (1999), 151. The American monument contains the names of the victorious battleships; the Roman would have had the actual rams of the captured ships. The dedication was captured in a short American Mutuscope and Biograph company film now in the Library of Congress Paper Print Collection. The monument was eventually placed at Van Ness Avenue and Market Street and its name changed to the California Volunteers' Monument.

46 Triumphal Roman arches celebrating American heroes and military victories were among the earliest neoclassical structures built to adorn New York public spaces, and civic extravaganzas were organized to commemorate those heroes and events. The Washington Square Arch was erected in 1876 to mark the centennial of George Washington's inauguration. Stanford White designed an arch (1889–92) to replace this temporary arch. White also designed the Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial Arch at the Grand Army Plaza, Brooklyn (1899–1902). My description of the Dewey Arch and Dewey's triumphal parade is based on the *Official Programme and Souvenir Reception of Admiral Dewey by the City of New York to Admiral Dewey September 29th and 30th, 1899*; King (1899); Stern et al. (1983), 20; and Bogart (1989), 100–4; 342.

47 *Official Programme* (1899), 6.

48 *Official Programme* (1899), 7.

49 "Two millions pay tribute to Dewey," *New York Times*, (October 1, 1899). In fact, the civic extravaganza was so popular that vandalism presented a threat to the Dewey Arch: many people wanted to take a piece of it home with them.
50 Mumford (1955), 61.
51 King (1894), 2.
52 Green quoted in Burrows and Wallace (1999), 1226.
53 Stern et al. (1983), 178.
54 (1904) *The Center of the First City of the World: Concerning the New Grand Central Station, Forty-Second Street, New York*, 1; and "Situated in the center of New York, the greatest city in America, the financial center of the world, and the most important commercial city on the globe, it occupies a unique position and is an ornament to its surroundings," 4–5. The New York Central and Hudson River Railroad Company, Passenger Department, produced this pamphlet.
55 (1904) *Center of the First City*, 3.
56 (1904) *Center of the First City*, 19.
57 For Pennsylvania Station, see Parissien (1996) and Stern et al. (1983), 40–2.
58 DeLaine (1999), 145–6. DeLaine also notes that the relationship between the concourse and the waiting hall in Penn Station is the same as the relationship between the *frigidarium* (cold pool) and the *natatio* (pool) of the Baths.
59 As R. G. Wilson put it: "Between the two spaces, one of modern materials, the other of (seemingly) ancient prototypes, McKim obviously intended for a dialogue to take place on the nature of American civilization." (1983), 217.
60 Quoted in R. G. Wilson (1983), 217.
61 Richardson (1912), 77.
62 Levine (1996), 60.
63 Levine (1988), 177.
64 In addition to Levine, see DiMaggio (1982), 303–22, and Harris (1990).
65 Lears (1994), 1–133, and (1983), 1–38.
66 For New York public baths, see Stern et al. (1983), 137–41.
67 Ibid., 138–9.
68 (1908) *The Fleischman Baths: Bryant Park Building, Forty-Second St. & Sixth Ave., New York City*. All quotations are from this advertising pamphlet, which is unpaginated.
69 There were also barber and hairdressing salons; a solarium which contained a tropical garden with trees, plants, flowers, statuary, and birds; a restaurant; and a grill. The baths also offered pool and billiard games, a bowling alley, and boxing matches in the gymnasium.
70 My description of Murray's is based on Bevington (1908) and Erkins (1907), 574–9. Brief discussions of the Roman Gardens can also be found in Stern et al. (1983), 224–5, and Koolhaas (1994), 101–3.
71 Bevington (1908), no pagination.
72 Erkins (1907), 575.
73 Bevington (1908), no pagination.
74 Ibid.
75 Bulwer-Lytton (1834; rpt. 1946), 23.
76 Bevington (1908), no pagination.

77 For this dinner, see G. M. Mayer (1958), 224–5.
78 The photograph is the Joseph Byron collection at the City Museum of New York. It is printed and discussed in G. M. Mayer (1958), 222–3. Mayer was unable to identify the precise occasion for the dinner.
79 Lessard (1996), 115.
80 James and Veblen quoted in Josephson (1934, rpt. 1962), 341.
81 White quoted in Brooklyn Museum (1979), 15.
82 Lessard (1996), 285. White was later shot by Nesbit's husband, Harry Thaw, a wealthy Pittsburgh industrialist, at a rooftop garden of a restaurant White had designed in Manhattan.
83 For Alma-Tadema's recreations of Rome, see Prettejohn (1996); Swanson (1977); C. Wood (1983); and Amaya (1962).
84 On how to add a Pompeian look to the home, see Riordan (1890), 73–5; see also McKenna (1896), 32–42, and Zimmern (1884), 71–3. The pages of the *Art Amateur* offered its readers in 1880–2 articles entitled "Industrial art: Ancient and modern mosaics;" "How the ancients used color," and "Furniture of the ancients."
85 For a description of one Roman garden designed by Charles A. Platt, see (1901), "Faulkner Farm, Brookline, Massachusetts," *House and Garden* 1/3: 1–11.
86 L. Wallace (1998), xx.
87 On dress, see Swanson (1977), 28; and the "Art in dress" sections of *Art Amateur: A Monthly Journal Devoted to Art in the Household* in 1882.
88 Winterer (2002), 144–5.
89 C. P. Fox and Parkinson (1985), 160.
90 In 1873 P. T. Barnum leased, from the Vanderbilts, the New York and Harlem Rail Road shed, which took up an entire square block bounded by Madison and Fourth Avenues and by Twenty-Sixth and Twenty-Seventh streets. Barnum remodeled it as the Great Roman Hippodrome and put on performances of the world's first three-ring circus. After Barnum gave up the lease in 1879, Vanderbilt renamed it Madison Square Garden. In 1885 Vanderbilt razed the building and sold the site to a group of millionaires, including Andrew Carnegie and J. P. Morgan, who hired Stanford White to design the new Madison Square Garden. Culhane (1990), 104–5.
91 Forepaugh-Sells Company (1898).
92 For the Kiralfy Brothers, see the short articles in the *Biographical Dictionary of Dance*; for Imre Kiralfy, see Barker (1994); for Bolossy, see Kiralfy (1988), and Senelik (1989).
93 In 1886 Imre and Bolossy split over a business disagreement, and Bolossy moved to England, where he produced spectacles for the enjoyment of the British.
94 B. Adams (1997), 188.
95 A claim asserted in a poster for the Great Barnum and Forepaugh Combination, located in the Circus File at the Museum of the City of New York.
96 Barnum (1890).
97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.

103 Ibid.
104 See J. F. Kasson's analysis of the carnivalesque aspects of Coney Island (1978).
105 Bogart (1989), 243. I am indebted to Bogart's discussion of Coney Island in this section.
106 Ibid., 244.
107 Amusement park entrepreneur Frederick Thompson, who designed Luna Park, one of Coney Island's parks, brought his skills into Manhattan. His New York Hippodrome (1905), located on Sixth Avenue between Forty-Third and Forty-Fourth streets, contained an enormous theatrical space for the performance of extravagant events. Its design also playfully subverted neoclassical architecture: the Hippodrome's column capitals had elephant heads, there were horses on the spandrels, and passersby could see live animals in cages through the glass on the street level. Stern et al. (1983), 208–9.
108 For the pyro-drama, see the discussion in Wyke (1997), 157, and D. Mayer (1984–5), 41–50. By the late 1880s *The Last Days of Pompeii* had been adopted for performance as a pyro-drama in England and it enjoyed considerable success there and later in America until well into the twentieth century.
109 See the discussion of Louisa Medina's adaptation of Bulwer-Lytton's novel in chapter 2.
110 Jacobson (1999).
111 As Jacobson (1999), 126, put it: "We consciously chose imperial power and many Americans liked it."
112 Virgil, *Aeneid* I.279.

7

Screening Rome During the Great Depression

In his memoir *Screening History*, novelist and political commentator Gore Vidal remembers the Washington of his childhood as a city strewn with recreations of imperial Roman grandeur and civic splendor; its monumental architecture dazzled him as a child. Vidal also records that he was forbidden to see the 1933 film *Roman Scandals*. The film offered its audiences a counter-narrative to the celebration of empire embodied in the neoclassical architecture of the nation's capital that awed Vidal then: the film's imperial Rome is decadent, corrupt, and oppressive. *Roman Scandals* pointedly conflated the graft and political corruption of 1930s America with imperial Rome, and Vidal's family saw it as critical of American governmental institutions and policies.[1] Not surprisingly, the family was especially sensitive to the film's message. Vidal's grandfather was a senator from Oklahoma, a state particularly hard hit by the combined catastrophes of the Depression and the Dust Bowl.

Americans had never faced anything quite like the Depression before. There had been economic depressions in the past but nothing as catastrophic and enduring as the events that followed in the wake of Black Tuesday, October 29, 1929. In the first two months after the Crash, the number of unemployed in the United States went from fewer than half a million to more than four million. By 1933, fifteen million Americans had no work. Banks closed, farms went bankrupt, factories shut down, and many thousands of people found themselves not only jobless, but also homeless. The triumphant optimism of the early years of the twentieth century, and the runaway consumption and consumerism of the 1920s, gave way to uncertainty and unrest as the imperial bubble burst and the United States endured the shock of the Great Depression.

Several Hollywood films produced during the worst years of the Depression utilized stereotypical images of Rome and Romans to address and to exploit anxieties precipitated by this economic catastrophe. Of these, two box-office hits, *The Sign of the Cross* (1932) and *Roman Scandals* (1933), employ the by now standard trope of Romans as the decadent oppressors of a virtuous, innocent, but ultimately triumphant people, but each figures its corrupt Romans in ways that

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spoke differently to Depression audiences. Each film's representation of Rome draws on the conventions of the genre to which the film belongs: historical epic and comedy. Cecil B. DeMille's "sword-and-sandal" epic *The Sign of the Cross* focused on the Roman persecution of Christians and offered spectators both an uplifting message of spiritual redemption and vicarious enjoyment of Roman wealth and decadence. By contrast, in Samuel Goldwyn's musical comedy *Roman Scandals*, ancient Rome and Depression America mirror each other; renewal and relief result from a cleansing of graft and corruption from the Roman, and hence also the American, political systems.

The Sign of the Cross

Building on the enormous popularity of nineteenth-century novels about Roman persecution of Christians and Jews, melodramatic plays known as "toga plays" became popular middlebrow stage entertainment in the 1890s.[2] Typically, the plays pit virtuous Christians or Jews against militaristic and depraved Roman oppressors. Like the novels, most feature delusional and tyrannical emperors, predatory and sexually dominating women, orgies, and spectacles of violence and excess in the Roman arena. In the early twentieth century, several of these novels and plays were adapted into film in an attempt to legitimate the new medium as an art form and widen its working-class audience to include the middle and upper classes. Between the years 1907 and 1917, the film industry devoted itself to literary, historical, and Biblical subjects, which were shown in elegant movie theaters. *Ben-Hur* was turned into a film in 1907 and again in 1925; *Quo Vadis* in 1912 and 1924; *The Last Days of Pompeii* in 1908, 1913, and 1926; and Wilson Barrett's 1895 toga play, *The Sign of the Cross*, in 1904 and 1914.[3] All were endorsed by churches and uplift movements as excellent ways to inculcate Christian values and, at the same time, offer entertaining adventure and romance. By 1910, 26 million people, nearly one-third of the population, went to the movies each week.[4] By the 1920s, cinema had become the nation's favorite form of commercial entertainment and the film industry was a major economic and cultural institution. Movies were on offer everywhere. Writing in the 1930s, author Margaret Thorp commented that "it is difficult to get out of range of a movie palace anywhere in the country . . . even Nevada has forty."[5] Cecil B. DeMille's *The Sign of the Cross* was shown throughout the nation.

In Barrett's toga play and DeMille's film, the conflict between Romans and Christians is structured around a romance. The Roman prefect, Marcus Superbus, has lived a sensual and decadent life until he meets, pursues, and is initially rebuffed by a young Christian woman, Mercia. Both experience conflict: the prefect's loyalty to Rome's militaristic values and his accustomed sexual freedom compete with his attraction to a woman whose chastity and turn-the-other-cheek morality threaten the core of his identity. The woman's conflict is simpler: she must resist

her erotic attraction to the Roman official until he adopts the new religion. The sadistic and debauched Emperor Nero, the stereotypical epitome of Roman vice and decadence, and his lascivious and predatory consort Poppaea (the power behind the scenes) imprison the Christians and condemn them to death. Just as Mercia is about to be thrown to the wild beasts in the arena, Marcus embraces Christianity and together the two attain martyrdom and eternal reward in the Roman arena.

On the narrative level, readers of nineteenth-century Victorian novels and toga dramas identified with the persecuted but ultimately triumphant Christians and distanced themselves from the Roman tyrannical oppressors. As we have seen in chapter 5, identification with early, pre-sectarian Christianity in the fictional world of literature and drama provided a satisfying vision of a community united by religious faith, amidst the lived reality of a nation fractured by religious, class, and economic divisions. In the dark days of the early 1930s, DeMille reached back to the pieties and moral assurances of the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant Progressive era's responses to the turbulence and disorder of the late nineteenth century. Like Barrett, DeMille looked back to the age of the Christian martyrs for an inspirational model of a strongly knit community whose moral certitude enabled it to triumph even in the midst of worldly calamities. Both men believed temporal ills could be overcome by moral regeneration.

The moralistic and didactic nature of Barrett's toga play meshed well with director Cecil B. DeMille's conservative views and Protestant background: the DeMille family first moved to America in 1658 and Cecil B. DeMille was intensely proud of his Protestant Dutch ancestry. Many members of the family were drawn to the ministry, and his father was a deeply religious teacher and a playwright. Henry DeMille, the patriarch, read a chapter from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament aloud to the DeMille children every day, and the children's bedroom walls were lined with prints of scenes and texts from the Bible.[6] As an adult, there was no separation of faith from work for DeMille. He kept a Bible beside him at meal times at the studio. When making *The Ten Commandments* (1923) he sent a Bible to every person on the payroll and he commanded his staff to keep their Bibles with them at all times: "Place it on your desk, and when you travel, stick it in your briefcase. Make it a daily habit." When making *The King of Kings* (1927) he again sent copies of the Bible to everyone, ordered that the staff memorize every word of the gospels, and called them in daily for a Bible lesson. He even addressed them from a pulpit.[7]

The Bible was the source of many of DeMille's films. Indeed, he believed he had a special opportunity and a responsibility to disseminate the Biblical message:

> We in the industry hold great power. Who else – except the missionaries of God – have had our opportunity to make the brotherhood of man not a phrase, but a reality – a brotherhood that has shared the same laughter and the same tears, dreamt the same dreams, been encouraged by the same hopes, inspired by the same faith in man and in God, which we painted for them, night after night, on the screens of the world?[8]

DeMille keenly felt the weight of the responsibility of his mission to bring the Bible to life in his films. "It is a sobering thought," he remarked, "that the decisions we make at our desks in Hollywood may intimately affect the lives of men, women, and children throughout the world."[9] Speaking about his 1956 *The Ten Commandments*, he said: "My interest is not in how much money it makes, but in the number of people who see it and carry away part of what Moses carried away from the burning bush."[10] *The Sign of the Cross* completed a trilogy DeMille began with his *The Ten Commandments* and *The King of Kings*. Looking back more than thirty years later, DeMille viewed them as "the three really important films in my career that have had most effect upon the world." They tell a story: "*The Ten Commandments* is the giving of the law, *The King of Kings* is the interpretation of the law, and *The Sign of the Cross* is the preservation of the law." Together "they show the way out, [to] those who have a spark of the soul left in them, [for] a soul that knows there is a God."[11] DeMille understood the power of film to shape and manipulate audiences, and he claimed he wanted his films to kindle Christian piety.

DeMille knew that film viewers desired visually rich and satisfying stories. Artistic license was necessary to bring Biblical (and other) tales to the screen in an appealing and dramatic manner. Accordingly, he sensationalized his uplifting message. Paramount Pictures advertised *The Sign of the Cross* as "the story of a love that attains fruition on the sun-baked, blood-red sands of the Roman arena."[12] He and his staff carefully studied the historical literature, the material culture and archaeology, and the paintings of the periods he brought to life on screen, but accuracy would always come second to the need for an entertaining narrative. DeMille clearly specified that he wanted "painterly richness of imagination more than scrupulous accuracy."[13] In *The King of Kings*, Mary Magdalene's house was not a simple prostitute's house but an opulent and lavish dwelling, and her interest in Judas supplied romance. Similarly, while immense research went into *Cleopatra* (1934), actress Claudette Colbert's gowns were more fitting for 1930s cocktail parties than for ancient Egypt.

Paramount Studios trumpeted historical verisimilitude in the promotional literature for *The Sign of the Cross* at the same time that the film magnified on screen stereotypes of Roman decadence and extravagance: "More than a year was spent in research and preparation. Accurate historical settings of a magnitude and magnificence never attempted before were built to ensure true realism. The Imperial City as it was in Nero's day was reproduced at the Paramount ranch in the foothills of the Santa Monica Mountains."[14]

The Sign of the Cross was released at Christmas time in 1932, the nadir of the Depression. Millions were unemployed, tens of thousands of people were homeless, and a catastrophic collapse of the entire banking system seemed imminent. DeMille meant *The Sign of the Cross* to carry a moral message for Americans: "The gods of materialism had failed."[15] The film's prologue urged people to "glance back through human history to men and women who held their ideals dearer than their lives. . . . The sacrifice of those martyrs who gave their lives

on the blood-red sands of Roman arenas preserves for us an eternal Truth. The faith born then is still available."[16] In the darkest moment of the Depression, Paramount advertised the film as "a shining light. In an America darkened by shattered dreams, empty words, unfilled promises a Spectacle that lifts up the Spirit. A Love that holds forth hope to an unhappy world."[17]

DeMille saw a clear analogy between Depression America and imperial Rome. The souvenir booklet to the film claimed:

> In *The Sign of the Cross* students of world affairs will find one of the most startling parallels to modern times. For life in ancient Rome is singularly similar in many of its aspects to life in modern America. The story of the luxury and extravagance of Rome finds striking reflection in our own easy life prior to the fatal autumn of 1929.[18]

Here, DeMille drew a parallel between the morals of the Jazz Age and ancient Rome, and the souvenir booklet suggested that the decadent behaviors of the Roman and American citizenry made each society vulnerable to catastrophe. For the Romans, the catastrophe was the barbarian invasions; for Americans, the Crash. DeMille told a reporter from the *New York American* on June 15, 1932: "Do you realize the close analogy between conditions today in the United States and the Roman Empire prior to its fall? Multitudes in Rome were then oppressed by distressing laws, overtaxed and ruled by a chosen few. Unless America returns to the pure ideals of our legendary forebears, it will pass into oblivion as Rome did."[19]

For DeMille, "our legendary forebears" were the early Christian martyrs and their Puritan and Protestant descendents in the New World. Like the earlier Victorian literature from which he drew, DeMille's cinematic trilogy suggested a deep historical and Christian identity for the nation. In DeMille's screening of history it would seem that the Romans have value only to the extent they are "decadent" and rich – a truism and a construction of popular culture; and, secondly, that they persecuted Christians. *The Sign of the Cross* urges a reaffirmation of the early ideals of the first Christians and their descendents in America; it is a call for a spiritual nationalism and renewal based on a revivified Christianity.

DeMille's signature cinematic style added a rich visual dimension to Wilson Barrett's nineteenth-century morality play. On the narrative level, *The Sign of the Cross* offered a pious message of moral regeneration and spiritual transformation but, as Maria Wyke has shown, the film also provided audiences visual pleasures through spectacular re-creations of Roman power and the imagined opulence of imperial Rome.[20] DeMille's film spices up old-time Christian morality and the pious sentimentalism of Victorian melodrama and fiction with generous amounts of sex and sadism; in *The Sign of the Cross*, religious uplift is sensationalized and given spectacle form.

The Sign of the Cross was not DeMille's first use of Rome as a site for spectacle and moral commentary on the present of his day. In 1922, his film *Manslaughter* compared the Jazz Age and its pursuit of pleasure to ancient Rome. In a flashback

sequence, modern New Year's Eve carousers are set in ancient Rome, and a stunningly lurid Roman orgy stands for the corrosive effects of the gin, jazz, and fast living of the 1920s.[21] The main character, Lydia, becomes a Roman empress who presides over and participates in the orgy, called a feast of Bacchus. The feast is enjoyed by scantily clad women and intoxicated revelers and satyrs, and the women become sexually aroused by the spectacle of male gladiatorial combat. In the midst of this debauch, bearded barbarians (the Vandals) wearing huge winged helmets arrive and proceed to rape, pillage, and plunder. The message is clear: decadence and the reckless pursuit of pleasure brought about the end of the Roman Empire, and 1920s America is inviting the same fate. "No different than Rome at its worst," intones the film's district attorney, the voice of the Law in its Biblical, patriarchal sense. Disaster is avoided through moral regeneration and the re-establishment of patriarchal authority: Lydia repents and marries the district attorney! In *Manslaughter*, DeMille exploited Rome's fabled decadence to make a point about the morals of the Jazz Age and, at the same time, offered his audiences a voyeuristic glimpse of forbidden pleasures and desires.

DeMille employed the same strategy in *The Sign of the Cross*. He retained the pious moralism of Barrett's toga play but added titillating scenes of violence and excess in and out of the Roman arena. Particularly noteworthy are a Roman orgy: a lesbian dancer, Ancaria, attempts to seduce the chaste Christian Mercia through an erotic dance; naked male courtiers attend to Nero, suggesting the emperor's homosexuality; lesbian handmaidens cater to his mistress Poppaea; a young Christian boy endures agonizing torture; and numerous sexual images of hands, lips, thighs, and feet litter the screen (figure 7.1). *The Sign of the Cross* also contains one of the most lurid Roman arena scenes in all of the Hollywood epics

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Figure 7.1 Mercia resisting lesbian seduction during a Roman orgy. *The Sign of the Cross*, 1932, dir. Cecil B. DeMille. Captured image from film by Margaret Malamud.

that feature blood in the arena. When the camera pans to the Roman audience in the amphitheater, their faces are contorted with avid desire for the kill, and the camera lingers on the gory slaughter of Christians. These Romans are so jaded that only the most depraved forms of sadism and cruelty can give them pleasure: naked women garlanded in flowers devoured by crocodiles, attacked by gorillas, and gored by bulls; elephants crushing the heads of chained men; and Amazon women spearing dwarfs and raising them aloft on their spears (figure 7.2). Critics routinely heaped scorn on DeMille's films for scenes like these but acknowledged his popularity with audiences; one critic noted ruefully: "Nobody likes DeMille pictures except the public." Clearly, the public enjoyed the scenes of Roman depravity at least as much – and likely more than – the scenes of Christian fortitude and piety. "After DeMille's lavish depiction of court orgies, wholesale slaughters, [and] unabashed sensuality," the *Boston Herald* commented, "Christianity comes out a rather poor second."[22] Another *Boston Herald* reviewer noted that "Mr. DeMille's real interest is in the wicked Romans. With the enthusiasm of an artist . . . he paints the manifold nature of their sins, their cruelties, their decadent luxuries."[23] DeMille understood very well the visual pleasures that came from watching his decadent Romans, and he was a master at portraying them on screen.

DeMille's scenes of Roman excess and opulence promoted consumption and consumerism at the same time that they reasserted traditional verities and pieties. In his 1934 *Cleopatra*, imperial Rome again provided a setting for fabulous displays of wealth, but this time these displays are held up as desirable, and the Egyptian

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Figure 7.2 Sex and sadism in the Roman arena. *The Sign of the Cross*, 1932, dir. Cecil B. DeMille. Captured image from film by Margaret Malamud.

queen has many of the qualities of the "new modern" woman promoted in film and advertising. [24] Cleopatra is witty, sophisticated, and glamorous; she is independent and self-assured; and she takes pleasure in her sexuality. But the representation of Cleopatra as an autonomous and powerful woman, the embodiment of the new roles open to women in the 1920s and 1930s, is given a familiar twist: she relinquishes her autonomy in favor of romantic love. "I am a woman not a queen," she tells Mark Antony. At the end of the day, she is a wife not a careerist. In *Cleopatra*, Rome signifies glamour, indulgence, and consumption (and as such it implicitly encourages such behaviors in the consumerist audience), while at the same time it functions to privilege the model of a woman who subordinates independence and autonomy to what is most important and essential to female identity – her role as wife.

DeMille's career "straddled" the late Victorian era and a consumer culture that shifted into high gear in the 1920s.[25] As a number of critics have observed, representations of luxury and opulence in his films stimulated material dreams and desires in film audiences and his sets were "display windows" for cosmetics, clothes, and household furnishings.[26] Many objected to DeMille's materialism and the consumerism it encouraged, including playwright Robert E. Sherwood, who observed that DeMille's "bathrooms are represented as glorified soda fountains . . . and beds constructed of the classiest Carrara marble and equipped with patent leather sheets."[27] Colbert's glamorous costumes and the film's lavish sets marketed a range of products from soaps to cigarettes, and the film's sumptuous Roman sets showcased consumer goods that helped set fashion trends in apparel and interior decoration; those who couldn't afford these commodities (and few could during the Depression) could enjoy them vicariously through the film.[28]

The religious epic was the perfect vehicle for DeMille's moral didacticism and orgiastic fantasy, and in *The Sign of the Cross* he capitalized on the potent combination of sex, sadism, and religion. *Variety* called the film "censor-bait," but noted that "every sequence in which religion wins out is built upon lurid details. The censors may object to the method, but they can't oppose the motive, and in the way *Cross* was produced one can't be in one without the other."[29] Writing about 1950s epics set in Rome, William Fitzgerald has pointed out that in these films

> There is a distinction to be made between the identifications that are encouraged on the narrative level and the thrills that are experienced on the level of spectacle, a distinction that allows the audience to have its cake and eat it, to be in two places at once. The decadent power and extravagance of the Romans could be enjoyed, appropriated, and, at the same time, disowned from the early Christian point of view.[30]

In a DeMille film you could simultaneously enjoy Roman decadence and identify with the early Christians – a pleasure that Hollywood epics set in ancient Rome still offer audiences.

Roman Scandals

In early 1933, Jewish film mogul Samuel Goldwyn decided to produce a comedy set in ancient Rome. Roman-themed films and plays were popular on Broadway and in theaters, and the perennial success of adaptations of *Ben-Hur* and the recent success of DeMille's *The Sign of the Cross* deserved a comic response. Goldwyn wanted a sendup of these pious and ponderous depictions of Rome, and he hired playwright Robert E. Sherwood and writer George S. Kaufman to produce a comic screenplay, and Frank Tuttle to direct the film. Well known for his sharp wit, Kaufman had collaborated with the Marx Brothers and Ira and George Gershwin. No stranger to comedies about Rome, Sherwood was the author of the successful 1926 Broadway play *The Road to Rome*, a comedy about Hannibal.

In *Roman Scandals*, vaudeville humor, populist sentiment, and spectacular Busby Berkeley dance numbers are set against the backdrop of a corrupt imperial Rome. Sherwood and Kaufman's screenplay for Goldwyn's film gives America's relationship to ancient Rome a contemporary twist: in their hands, the legacy of Rome is the subject of comic ridicule and subversion. Plutarch's noble Romans, still a staple of education in 1930s America, are nowhere to be seen; instead, modern American institutional elites are the descendents of corrupt imperial Roman elites. The cinematic conventions of spectacle films set in antiquity are also given comic treatment: chariot races, orgies, people thrown to the lions, harem and bath scenes, corrupt emperors and scheming, predatory empresses are all parodied. Absent, however, is any hint of the popular trope of Romans as persecutors of Christians – grafters, corrupt officials and monopoly capitalism are the evils in this Rome, and the oppressed are slaves, women, and ordinary citizens.

The roots of *Roman Scandals* lie in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century vaudeville and burlesque traditions in which European and American "highbrow" art and culture were parodied.[31] During the Progressive era, reformers, especially Protestant women, were increasingly active in working to address social problems through educational uplift programs, temperance movements, and church organizations. Inspired in part by Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), many hoped that a promotion of "high" culture (according to Arnold, "the best that has been thought and said in the world") could improve the people and the nation by example. Well-meaning women's groups hoped to civilize and assimilate immigrants and the poor by means of culturally improving visits to museums, sermons, talks, and entertainments with a moral content. For some Progressive-era reformers, art, culture, and Protestantism were considered the best means to incorporate the discontented and the newcomers into a shared value system. Their efforts, and the pious and uplifting entertainments they recommended, were soon parodied and given farcical treatment.

In 1896, Joseph Weber and Lew Fields, a Polish-Jewish vaudeville team, opened the Weber and Fields Music Hall in New York City, where they offered burlesques,

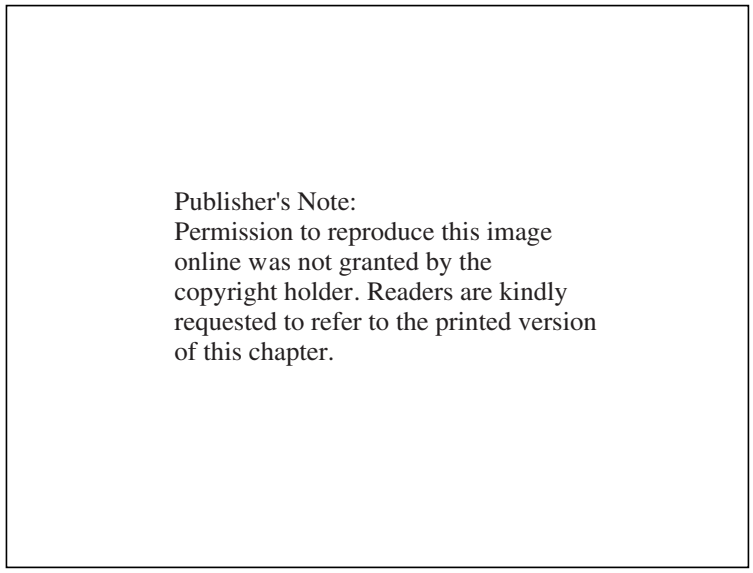
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Figure 7.3 Petrolius (Petronius) keeps an eye on a tipsy Zero (Nero). *Quo Vass Iss?* c.1896. Courtesy of the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

such as *Quo Vass Iss*, a spoof of Henryk Sienkiewicz's novel *Quo Vadis*.[32] Weber and Field's *Quo Vass Iss* is an example of dialect comedy; the burlesque was sprinkled with Yiddish phrases. (Chico Marx with his stagy Italian accent, mangled English usage, and malapropisms is a later example of dialect comedy.) Edgar Smith's *Quo Vas Iss? A Travesty Upon "Quo Vadis"* also targets Sienkiewicz's novel and Wilson Barrett's toga play *The Sign of the Cross* (figure 7.3).[33] Smith's characters have comic variations of the names of characters in Sienkiewicz's novel and Barrett's play: Marcus Finishus (Marcus Vinicius); Petrolius (Petronius); Zero (Nero); Popcornea (Poppaea); Fursus (Ursus); and Lythia (Lygia). In this burlesque, Lythia is a member of the Christian Temperance Union, which has closed the city's saloons. Marcus Finishus is in love with Lythia, who makes the sign of a lobster instead of the fish or a cross. Lythia is accused of having bewitched Fido, Popcornea's pet dog. Zero sends her to the arena for being a member of the Christian Temperance Movement and wanting to burn "Rum" (Rome). Fursus fights a bull with Lythia tied on it and both are pardoned by Zero. Slang punctures the moral pretensions of the novel and play: "Hail to Petrolius, the oily Roman gent, if he is not a cuckoo, we do not want a cent, though mighty Zero's reigning, it's Petrolius we hail; and the people love him better than they love a bargain sale. Hail Petrolius, hail!" Burlesques of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Julius Caesar* (*Julius Cnaesar* and *The Roasting of Brutus on the Plains of Phillippi – Red Hot!*) were also popular, as well as burlesques of the adaptations of *Ben-Hur* on stage and at the circus (such as *Bend Her*). The use of dialect and slang to mock the affectations

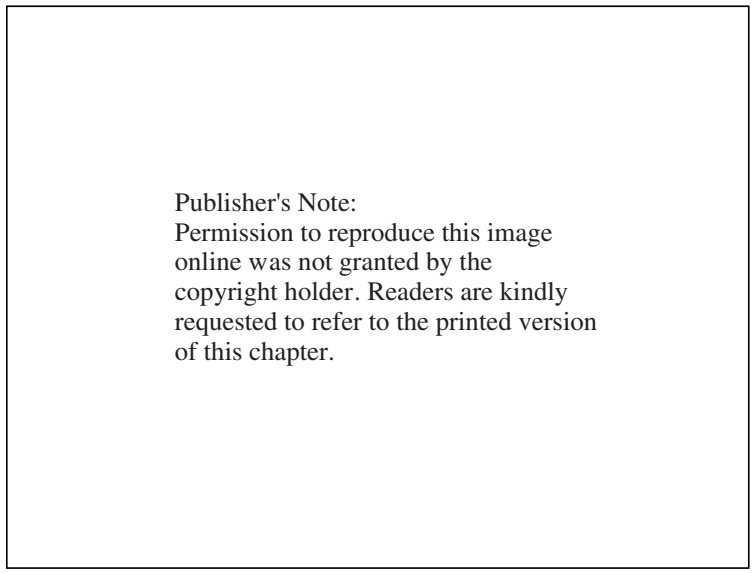
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Figure 7.4 Mock gladiatorial combat. *Friends, Romans and Leo*, 1917, dir. Alan Crosland. Courtesy of the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

of the middle- and upper-class white Anglo-Saxon Protestants appealed to working-class audiences in general and Jewish and Catholic immigrants in particular.

There were also cinematic spoofs of silent spectacle films set in ancient Rome such as *Quo Vadis*, *The Sign of the Cross*, and *The Last Days of Pompeii*. In *Friends, Romans and Leo* (1917) a decidedly unmuscular white male slave with glasses, Morpheus, engages in a comic combat as a gladiator in the arena (figure 7.4). Morpheus manages to woo and win the Emperor Mulius's daughter, Myria, who is the object of desire of the imperial loan shark, Liarus Bunko. Instead of satisfying his lust, Liarus Bunko is eaten by a lion in the arena as the audience, eating peanuts (as if at a baseball game), watches the comic spectacle. In *The Three Ages* (1923), starring Buster Keaton, a sendup of D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916), there is a parody of the famous chariot race in the popular stage production of *Ben-Hur* and the 1907 silent film version. In this film, Keaton races with a chariot drawn by a mule and unmatched horses while that of his opponent, Wallace Beery, is drawn by dogs, with one in the back of the chariot as a spare. Melodramatic toga plays, novels, and early silent films set in antiquity provided rich material for comedians desiring to poke fun at pious entertainment and the proselytizing and earnest intentions of its patrons and sponsors.

The trio of Guy Bolton, Jerome Kern, and P. G. Wodehouse wanted to elevate musical comedy and get away from "clowning and Weberfieldian cross-talk."[34] They produced up-to-date musical comedies for sophisticated audiences with their New York Princess Theatre shows. They set their 1917 *Leave it to Jane*

on a college campus, which allowed them to produce songs that played with such historical and literary subjects as the Arthurian tradition ("Sir Galahad") and Cleopatra ("Cleopatterer"). The silent film hit *Cleopatra*, starring femme fatale Theda Bara, had been released earlier that year, and Jane, a college freshman, wishes she could be like the devastatingly seductive Egyptian queen "Cleopatterer":

> In days of old beside the Nile
> A famous queen there dwelt.
> Her clothes were few, but full of style.
> Her figure slim and swelt.
> On every man that wandered by
> She pulled the Theda Bara eye.
>
> At dancing Cleopatterer,
> Was always on the spot.
> She gave these poor Egyptian ginks,
> Something else to watch besides the spinx
>
> Marc Antony admitted,
> That what first made him skid,
> Was the wibbly, wobbly, wiggly dance,
> That Cleopatterer did.[35]

In this representation of Cleopatra, the Egyptian queen is figured as a modern vamp, something audiences clearly appreciated. In a similar vein, John Erskine's best-selling 1925 novel, *The Private Life of Helen of Troy*, featured an impenitent and quite modern Helen ("He never would have taken me if I hadn't wanted to go"). The popularity of the novel led director Alexander Korda in 1927 to make it into a silent film, which received critical and popular acclaim.

Playwright Robert E. Sherwood, recognizing the popular taste for Erskine's novel and other "middle-brow" books like Will Durant's 1926 *Story of Philosophy*, commented:

> [There is] a widespread conspiracy to divest history of its text-book formality . . . Clio [the muse of history] has always been an austere figure, clad in marble robes and perched up before public libraries for the purpose of scaring away those who approach such dignified edifices with other than serious, studious intent. Nowadays, Clio is being urged to step down from her pedestal and meet the boys.[36]

Sherwood thought this was a good thing; like Cecil B. DeMille he believed that history should be accessible, popular, and entertaining, and saw no reason "why history should continue to be chastely academic and formidably dull."[37]

Sherwood's own critically acclaimed and popular 1926 Broadway play *The Road to Rome* was neither dull nor academic.[38] It offered a comic explanation for the mystery of why, in 218 BCE, the Carthaginian leader Hannibal, after crossing

the Alps and routing the Roman army, did not sack the city that had been his lifelong goal. In Sherwood's play, Hannibal's failure to sack Rome is explained in terms of his love for a young Roman woman, Amytis, who enables him to acknowledge the pointlessness of conquest and war. In the play, Amytis is engaged to the elderly, pompous dictator Fabius Maximus. She is bored, so when Fabius asks her, "What are you thinking about now, my dear?" she replies: "I was just wondering what it would be like to be despoiled."[39] On an outing outside of the city she is captured by Hannibal's soldiers, who bring her to him. A romance sparks, and Amytis tries to persuade Hannibal not to sack the city. When she asks him why he fights, he finds it difficult to come up with an answer; for him, the road to Rome has been "littered with the bones of dead men. Perhaps they know why they died. I don't."[40] Amytis urges him to turn back: "Rome will destroy itself. Success is like a strong wine, Hannibal; give a man enough of it, and he'll drink himself to death. Rome will do that, too, if you leave it alone."[41] "If I recognize your truths," Hannibal replies, "I'll have to believe that all my life has been wasted – that all those men who have fallen along the road to Rome have died for nothing."[42] Hannibal decides not to sack Rome, and the play suggests that real manhood is the ability *not* to fight. As he retreats, taking Amytis with him, Hannibal says: "I'm leaving Rome to an enemy that is crueler even than I am . . . I shall allow Rome to destroy itself."[43]

In the introduction to his play, Sherwood commented on Republican Rome's fall from virtue and compared it to 1920s America. In Sherwood's view, by the second century BCE, "Rome's government was in the hands of evil, lustful, vindictive men, like Cato, who gloried in conquest and bloodshed and destruction."[44] In his opinion, Rome's vices, rather than her virtues, predominated in the America of President Calvin Coolidge ("The business of America is business"): "The spirit of Fabius Maximus and his brother boosters has become the spirit of America today."[45] Continuing the analogy, Sherwood wrote: "Fabius was a leading exponent of the old regime in Rome – a cautious, conservative reactionary. Today he would be numbered among the stand-patters of the Republican Party, and would undoubtedly be high in the favor of the White House Spokesman."[46] Sherwood hoped that audiences would recognize the parallels between his Romans and modern Americans. And indeed, the dictator Fabius Maximus sounds like a staunch Republican of the day when he proclaims: "No state can survive unless it is founded on good, sound military strength and a policy of progressive conquest."[47] Sherwood was a pacifist and he worried that America was repeating Rome's slide into a destructive imperialism and greedy materialism.

In 1933, Sherwood again turned to Rome to critique contemporary America when he collaborated with the prolific George S. Kaufman to produce the screenplay for Goldwyn's *Roman Scandals.* Kaufman was another politically engaged Broadway writer and producer. He wrote the book for the 1927 Gershwin musical comedy *Strike Up the Band*, whose anti-war sentiments were so strong that the show folded on the road.[48] Kaufman directed and wrote the book (along with

Morrie Riskind) for another Gershwin musical comedy, *Of Thee I Sing* (1931), which was sharply critical of Congress, political conventions, the Supreme Court, beauty contests, and even motherhood. The musical comedy won the Pulitzer Prize in 1932 for drama. *Let 'Em Eat Cake*, the 1933 successor to *Of Thee I Sing*, was even more scathing of society and politics. "If *Strike Up the Band* was a satire on War," Ira Gershwin wrote years later, "and *Of Thee I Sing* one on Politics, *Let 'Em Eat Cake* was a satire on Practically Everything."[49] In early 1933, as George Gershwin's biographer Edward Jablonski put it, "Kaufman and Ryskind had plenty of Practically Everything to shoot their barbs at."[50]

When Franklin D. Roosevelt was inaugurated in March of 1933, fifteen million unemployed, 25 percent of the labor force, clamored for relief. Many lived in "Hoovervilles," shacks built of tin, cardboard, and castoffs in city dumps. The banking system was on the verge of collapse and Roosevelt declared an emergency Bank Holiday to stop runs on the banks. There were strikes, protests, and marches; the nation was in a turbulent state. Drastic political intervention was both feared and desired by many in the United States. Some were attracted to fascism and many thousands of other Americans were members of the Communist Party, including Frank Tuttle, the director of *Roman Scandals*. Anticipating by two years Sinclair Lewis's 1935 best-selling novel about the fragility of democracy and the rise of fascism in America, *It Can't Happen Here*, Gershwin and Ryskind's musical comedy *Let 'Em Eat Cake* chronicled the rise of an American dictatorship through the machinations of politicians, industrialists, and the military.[51] But this musical comedy, which opened in October of 1933, was not a popular success. Americans who wanted to give the new president's administration and the New Deal a chance were alienated by the production's unrelenting darkness.[52] *Roman Scandals*, on the other hand, which opened at the end of 1933, did top business in every city it played in, making it one of the 15 most popular films of 1934 and United Artists' top-grossing film of the year.

The hero of *Roman Scandals*, Eddie (Eddie Cantor), lives in West Rome, a town that is being undermined by the greed and graft of the leading citizens of the town: the banker, the police, and the mayor are all in cahoots. The film opens with the banker, Mr. Cooper, performing the opening ceremonies at a Museum of Roman Art that he has endowed. Posing as a civic philanthropist, Cooper is actually a sly grafter who has made a huge profit on his "gift." This immediately establishes a connection between ancient Rome and its modern appropriations: Roman art and philanthropy function as a sign for corruption and as a cloak for the exploitative behaviors of the institutional elites of the town. The opening scene punctures the image that the museum projects to its patrons: that of a decorous and refined Rome.

Eddie, a local errand boy, is accidentally locked inside the museum overnight. He hangs his clothes and shoes on classical statues in the museum (replicas of the *Winged Victory* of Samothrace, *Venus de Milo*, *Dying Gaul*, *Apollo Belvedere*, Farnese *Hercules*) and goes to sleep. The next morning he startles the museum's solidly

middle-class female patrons, who awaken him when they enter to celebrate the opening day of the museum, and Eddie is soon thrown out of the museum. The scene recalls Charlie Chaplin's film *City Lights* (1931), which opened with the unveiling of a public monument. Chaplin's tramp sleeps at the base of the monument and catches his pants on the sword held by one of the figures of freedom, garbed in classic dress, and the police eject the tramp from the ceremony. Cultural historian Lary May has commented that this scene in Chaplin's film suggests that "public life and 'liberty' are the preserve of the rich and their middle-class followers."[53] Similarly, the opening of *Roman Scandals* suggests that the museum and the high art (classical sculpture) it contains are the preserve of the middle and upper classes. In fact, Eddie knows and loves Roman history, but when he offers his commentary on the Romans and their art and corrects Mr. Cooper's errors, he is hustled out of the museum. Access to classical art and history is a sign of status and privilege, and separates the well-to-do from ordinary working-class people like Eddie.

Later that morning, Cooper, the mayor, and the chief of police discuss Cooper's latest scam: he will evict families from some land and donate it for the construction of a new city jail, and the three will split the contractor's fees. But when the police chief drops the check Cooper gives him to buy him off, Eddie finds it. Eddie commiserates with the people who will be made homeless when Cooper takes over their land. They look like second-generation European and East European immigrants: an organ grinder with a monkey, a man playing an accordion, men and women with beer steins, and others eating donuts. In the musical number "Build a Little Home," Eddie leads the people in a dance and urges them to create a community on the street. The musical number embodies the spirit of populism, all join hands and dance, and the lyrics urge dispensing with the pseudo-need for commodities.

Eddie is thrown out of West Rome for protesting the plot by Cooper and his cronies. As he leaves the town, he expresses his desire to return to ancient Rome, "where men were real men," and finds himself transported, miraculously, to imperial Rome, where, instead of meeting virtuous Romans, he encounters a state just as corrupt as capitalist, class-divided America. The Emperor Valerius (a fictional emperor) and a corrupt Senate oppress slaves, women, and ordinary citizens just as Mr. Cooper, the mayor, and the chief of police exploit the people of West Rome. Eddie is sold as a slave in a slave market and ends up being taken to the Emperor Valerius' palace. The Empress Agrippa (a Roman male name) repeatedly tries to poison Valerius, and Eddie is made the new food taster. He overhears the emperor tell his councilors that they will again raise the taxes to build a new palace, and then keep the money left over. The councilors make Valerius put his promises in writing, but they drop the scroll and Eddie finds it. He exposes the emperor and his cronies, a chariot race ensues, and Eddie's chariot goes over a cliff. He wakes up in West Rome and finds in his pocket the check with which Cooper paid off the chief of police. He races back with the evidence, and the

corrupt officials are put in prison, after which the evicted citizens move back into their homes. The film thus ends with a restoration of a cleansed political system in small-town America.

Musical Interludes

Two musical interludes feature Busby Berkeley-choreographed spectacles starring the Goldwyn Girls, the musical company of female dancers employed by the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studio. In "No More Love," an extraordinary musical number set in a Roman slave market, the Goldwyn Girls, wearing little more than long blonde wigs, are chained to a pedestal and displayed for sale (figure 7.5). Those not chained are kept in line by whip lashings, and Roman men eager to purchase them leer. The women are doubly enslaved and exploited: as slaves and as the prisoners of male desire. The number ends with the death of a female slave who tries to avoid being sold (she falls to her death from the display pedestal), and her death prompts one of the women to sing the dirge-like "No More Love."

By contrast, "Keep Young and Beautiful," set inside the imperial harem, focuses on cosmetic products and secrets for enhancing female beauty and sexual allure. The women in the harem convey the message through song and dance

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Figure 7.5 Goldwyn Girl displayed for sale in Roman slave market. *Roman Scandals*, 1933, dir. Frank Tuttle. Film still from the private collection of Margaret Malamud.

that their identity is their beauty and that they must adorn themselves and take care of their bodies to encourage male desire. Eddie enters the harem disguised in blackface as an Ethiopian doctor who has beauty secrets, and he gives musical instructions to the female slaves on what products are necessary and how best to enhance their looks.

Like DeMille's fabulously decadent Roman sets, the Busby Berkeley dance numbers allowed Depression audiences simultaneously to enjoy and condemn spectacles of excess, sadism, and consumption set in ancient Rome. In the musical numbers set in antiquity, Rome signifies the exploitative tendencies of twentieth-century capitalism and consumerism. These musical spectacles are framed and contained by those set in West Rome. In "Build a Little Home," performed at the beginning and reprised at the end of the film, Eddie leads the townspeople in a song-and-dance number that celebrates the unimportance of commodities, and dreams of a utopia where there are none for sale.[54]

A Jewish-American in a Toga

Much of the humor in the film comes from Eddie Cantor (born Israel Iskowitz), a New York Jewish vaudeville performer turned film star.[55] Cantor spent his childhood living over a delicatessen on the Lower East Side and spoke Yiddish (when he spoke English he peppered his speech with Yiddish phrases). He worked first in vaudeville, later performed for over a decade with Florenz Ziegfeld as a revue comic, and finally turned to film. By 1932–3, Cantor was one of the top five box-office attractions and a well-known show business personality. In nearly all of his films he played a displaced second-generation Jewish immigrant: in the American West in *Whoopee!* (1930); in Spain in *Kid from Spain* (1932); in Egypt in *Kid Millions* (1934); and in Baghdad in *Ali Baba Goes to Town* (1937). In *Roman Scandals* Cantor is clearly an Eastern European Jewish immigrant in ancient Rome – when he is captured by Roman centurions and placed on sale at a slave market, Cantor pitches himself to potential buyers, "look at these skins, imported – all the way from Russia" – and the incongruity of the ethnic actor and the setting contributes much to the film's humor (figure 7.6).

Goldwyn's musical comedy continued the burlesque and vaudeville traditions of thumbing noses at high culture and the sentimental pieties of moralizing fiction and film. Rich in slang, burlesque, colloquialisms, and slapstick, *Roman Scandals* was praised by critics for its success in the arena of low comedy; according to *Variety*, "it has the virtue of being vigorous low comedy conveyed in terms of travesty, and the device is almost foolproof."[56] *Roman Scandals* offered American audiences comic relief from the image of the "noble Romans" of the Republic, those toga-clad figures of fortitude, self-denial, and patriotism that used to crop up with great regularity in civics lessons, political discourse, and the arts. The Marx Brothers had mocked the value of education in the 1932 *Horse Feathers*

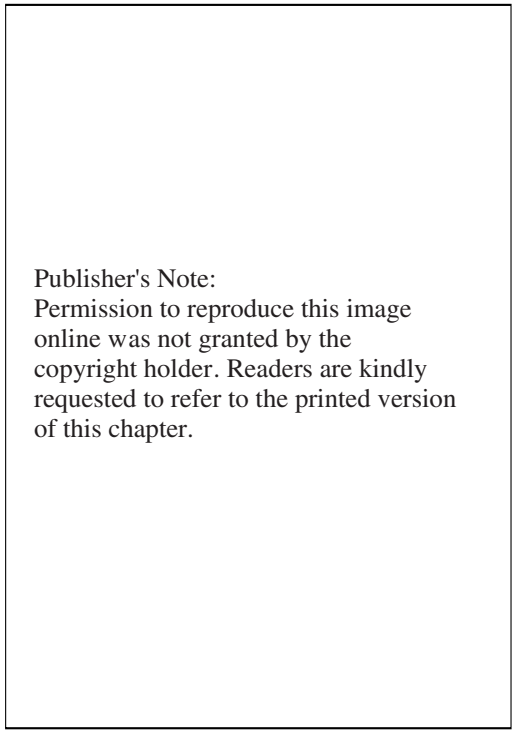
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Figure 7.6 Eddie hamming it up in Rome. *Roman Scandals*, 1933, dir. Frank Tuttle. Film still from the private collection of Margaret Malamud.

and highbrow culture in the 1935 *A Night at the Opera*. *Roman Scandals* satirizes virtuous, civic-minded Romans. The Roman emperor and the Roman Senate oppress the Roman citizenry, just as their descendents, the civic leaders in West Rome, exploit American citizens. Eddie, a man of the people, confounds ancient Romans with his smart-aleck patter, chutzpah, and cagey, quick-witted maneuvers.

Roman Scandals also deflated the myth of the grandeur and decadence of imperial Rome, a myth that the Hollywood film industry in general and Cecil B. DeMille in particular helped to disseminate in American culture. Robert Sherwood made no secret of his dislike for cinematic epic spectacles set in antiquity. He believed that colossal sets and special effects dwarfed narrative content and meaning. Sherwood also intensely disliked DeMille films: "Think of all the grotesque absurdities with which the movies abound, and which have made the screen a tempting target for satirists, and you will find that most of them may be traced back, by direct or indirect routes, to Cecile B. DeMille." In Sherwood's view, DeMille's flair for combining pious sentimentalism with spectacle was a cheap kind of success; it came from a "gaudy form of hokum" and a sentimental sensationalism.[57]

Sherwood and Kaufman's screenplay parodied "sword-and-sandal" films and the established cinematic conventions of the historical epic's representations of Rome. Theirs is not the corrupt Rome of mad emperors like Nero, and their Romans are not the decadent oppressors of Christians. Stereotypical images of cinema's

ancient Rome provide the writers with the material for gags, jokes, and burlesque humor. When the Empress Agrippa attempts to seduce him, Eddie acts like a coy and blushing maiden intent on preserving her chastity. He uses a mudbath to disguise himself as a woman when he enters the imperial harem, and then uses a blackface routine to impersonate an Ethiopian male beauty specialist so that he can move freely about the harem. There are comic orgies and Eddie is threatened with being thrown to the lions. The long chariot race where Roman soldiers pursue Eddie parodies the famous chariot race in the stage and film versions of *Ben-Hur*.[58] In 1933, DeMille's films were the target of some of *Roman Scandals*' comic barbs, but Sherwood, Kaufman, and Goldwyn also recognized and capitalized on the public's desire for entertaining narratives about Rome and Romans.

Roman Scandals and *The Sign of the Cross* offered reassuring and essentially conservative responses to the crises of the Depression era. The prospective alternatives for radical change – anarchism and socialism on the left and various brands of right-wing populism or fascism on the right – were both likely to frighten the studios and the distributors of films in the 1930s, as well as many movie patrons. DeMille's film drew a familiar analogy between Neronian Rome and the American present, and he offered a parable for Depression America. In his film, audiences could identify with the Christians who endured Roman oppression from the vantage point of history – and enjoy spectacles of Roman excess and decadence – knowing that Christianity ultimately triumphed in the Roman world.[59] DeMille's moralistic message for Americans during the crisis of the Depression was rooted in a vision of the United States as an Anglo-Saxon Protestant nation. Like the nineteenth-century novels and plays on which the film drew, *The Sign of the Cross* assumes and promotes an American identification with early Christians persecuted by Romans. Moral regeneration rather than political revolution was prescribed, and reward and retribution are deferred to another, future era.

By contrast, *Roman Scandals* offered a more inclusive and pluralistic vision of American identities. Goldwyn's film celebrates the pluck and decency of ordinary working-class citizens in America, many of whom were second-generation immigrants. For many movie goers, Eddie Cantor stood for the common immigrant experience in America of stereotyping and oppression: in one scene from his most famous stage and film success, the 1930 *Whoopee!*, Cantor assumed various disguises, including a tough-talking Western bandit, a Greek short-order cook, a Native American, and a blackface minstrel, in a burlesque of ethnic and racial stereotypes. In another scene, Cantor meets a Native American chief and the two have a comic exchange in which they recognize that Jews and Native Americans have much in common in America: both are the subjects of racism and oppression.[60] In Goldwyn's film, Eddie is cast as a downtrodden but decent and resourceful upholder of traditional American political values. In *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*, Neal Gabler has described how immigrant producers and directors displaced an Anglo-Saxon Americanism and created their own celluloid vision of the American dream in their films.[61] *Roman Scandals* exemplifies

this process. Samuel Goldwyn cast Eddie Cantor as a hero and spokesperson for the American democratic tradition. Cantor is the comic hero who rescues ordinary citizens from the graft and corruption of West Rome's ruling elites. Liberation comes about through a melding of identities into a common voice and by the removal of the ancient as well as the modern oppressors from political office through a cleansed political system.

Goldwyn's film, like nearly all successful film comedies of the 1930s, "flirted" with the need for social change, but ultimately responded to the crises of the Depression era by reasserting a faith in the American political process and traditional values.[62] The Marx Brothers' 1933 *Duck Soup* went too far; it parodied the very idea of patriotism and thus did not do well at the box office. The mood and message of *Roman Scandals* are closer to the sentimental optimism of the films of immigrant director Frank Capra, such as *It Happened One Night* (1934) or *You Can't Take It With You* (1938), than the anarchic humor and cynicism of the Marx Brothers. Writing for the leftist *New Masses*, Nathan Adler (unsurprisingly) criticized *Roman Scandals* for precisely this reason:

> The petty bourgeois temper recognizes at all times a "social" problem – "bad" government in need of reform, "unfortunate" circumstances (evictions, unemployment) – and the tendered solution is always with the "good" individual. Though the recognition of the current social predicament is present, Cantor, and the petty bourgeoisie, are too much rooted in the sentiments and values of the golden age, they still retain the smug optimism, the drooling, mawkish sentimentality and the glittering tinsel.[63]

Adler is critical because the film suppresses political revolution by suggesting that the political system works – it is individuals who are bad, not the system itself. *Roman Scandals* ends with the restoration of democracy and assimilation rather than revolution.[64] Comedy and the spirit of populism erase economic and class divisions, the town's citizenry dance together as one united group, and democracy and decency prevail – a formula that would be repeated successfully again and again in Hollywood popular movies throughout the twentieth century.

Notes

1 Vidal (1992), 18–19. See Wyke's (1997) discussion of Vidal, cinema, and history, 1–13.
2 D. Mayer (1994), 10.
3 Wyke discusses these and other films in her 1997 ground-breaking study.
4 Ross (1998), 11; 14–30.
5 Thorp (1939), 9.
6 Higham (1973), 4–5.
7 Ibid., 112; 160; 167.
8 DeMille quoted in Essoe and Lee (1970), 18.
9 DeMille quoted in Pratt (1989), 141; C. B. DeMille (1959), 305–6.

10 DeMille quoted in Essoe and Lee (1970), 15.
11 DeMille quoted in Pratt (1989), 139–40.
12 Essoe and Lee (1970), 147; 195.
13 C. B. DeMille (1934), 99.
14 Promotional literature for *Sign of the Cross* in the University of Southern California Cinema-Television archive.
15 C. B. DeMille (1959), 325.
16 Ibid.
17 Promotional literature for *Sign of the Cross* in the University of Southern California Cinema-Television archive.
18 *Sign of the Cross* souvenir booklet, University of Southern California Cinema-Television archive.
19 DeMille quoted in Higham (1973), 216, and also quoted in Wyke (1997), 132. See Wyke's analysis of the relevance of the Depression to DeMille's depiction of Rome under Nero and her analysis of the film's reception when it was re-released during World War II with a new prologue and epilogue. Wyke (1997), 131–7. See also the discussion of the re-release in chapter 8.
20 Wyke (1997), 135–7.
21 Higham (1973), 94.
22 December 25, 1932.
23 January 1, 1933.
24 Wyke (1997), 90–7.
25 Higashi (1994), 6.
26 Ibid., 143.
27 Sherwood (1925), 11.
28 Higashi (1994), 143.
29 *Variety* (December 6, 1932).
30 Fitzgerald (2001), 26.
31 The application of the terms "highbrow" and "lowbrow" goes back to the late nineteenth century. See chapter 6.
32 Fields and Fields (1993), 162.
33 E. Smith (c.1896). The Rare Book and Special Collections Division of the Library of Congress has another burlesque of *Quo Vadis*, entitled *Quo Vadis Upside Down*. This burlesque was performed in New York at Keith's Fourteenth Street Theatre. *New York Times* (November 24, 1901): 15.
34 Quoted in Green (1980), 55.
35 Kern (1959).
36 Sherwood (1927), xli.
37 Ibid., xliv.
38 *The Road to Rome* served as the basis for George Sidney's 1955 film musical *Jupiter's Darling*, starring Howard Keel as Hannibal, Esther Williams as Amytis, and George Sanders as Fabius Maximus. It did not do well at the box office.
39 Sherwood (1927), 42.
40 Ibid., 116.
41 Ibid., 163–4.
42 Ibid., 166.

43 Ibid., 175.
44 Ibid., xxxv–vi.
45 Ibid., xxxix.
46 Ibid., xxvi.
47 Ibid., 23.
48 Green (1980), 93.
49 Gershwin quoted in Jablonski (1998), 242.
50 Jablonski (1998), 243.
51 Ibid., 243–5.
52 Green (1980), 94–5.
53 L. May (2000), 75.
54 Thompson and Rant (1987), 36–43.
55 Cantor describes his childhood on the Lower East Side and his years in vaudeville, film, radio, and television in his autobiography. Cantor with Ardmore (1957).
56 *Variety* (December 26, 1933).
57 Sherwood (1925), 12.
58 "The idea of a noble Roman being hurled about by nothing more than a so-called chariot whip proved to be popular both times it was tried," wrote *New York Times* critic Mordaunt Hall. *New York Times* (December 25, 1933). Later, in 1966, director Richard Lester parodied the ponderous 1950s Hollywood epics set in Rome in a similar fashion in his cinematic adaptation of the smash Broadway musical *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. I analyze the Broadway production and the film in M. Malamud (2001).
59 Depression audiences found similar pious messages in other "disaster" films from the decade. In *The Last Days of Pompeii* (dir. Ernest Schoedsack, 1935), the calamities of the Roman past are conflated with the disaster of the Depression. At the end of the film the blacksmith, Marcus, converts to Christianity as Vesuvius erupts, and gives up his own life to save the lives of others. See Wyke's analysis of this film (1997), 147–82. The uplifting end of Schoedsack's film is similar to the ending of another popular "disaster" film, *San Francisco* (1936), where low-life saloon proprietor Clark Gable repents his errant ways and is reborn after the great earthquake in San Francisco in 1906.
60 This is a comic predecessor to *Blazing Saddles* (1974), where director and actor Mel Brooks plays a Jewish Native American.
61 Gabler (1988). During this era, studio producers frequently intervened in film production and they had ultimate control over the final product.
62 "If the films of the early Depression flirted with the need for social change and authority, [Frank] Capra's political films dealt with the need for a return to the basics of American tradition." Levine (1993), 251. Elsewhere, he noted that during the early years of the Great Depression "The remarkable thing about the American people before reform did come was not their action but their inaction, not their demands but their passivity, not their revolutionary spirit but their traditionalism." Ibid., 209.
63 Adler (1934), 28–9.
64 Thompson and Rant (1987), 35–6. John Belton has described how Hollywood comedy functions "as a kind of cultural safety valve – letting off steam that would otherwise build up and explode, destroying the entire system"; its goal is integration and the re-establishment of social and political order. Belton (1994), 141.

8

Cold War Romans

In his autobiography *Being Red*, Howard Fast recalls his exchange with the "censor" at the *New York Times* in 1951 about an ad he wanted to run for *Spartacus*, his self-published Marxist parable about the slave revolt against Rome. The *Times* man studied it and then commented that it did not appear to have anything "demonic" in it. "What about the book?" he asked. "Anything about the overthrow of the government by force or violence?" "Not this government," replied Fast. "Ancient Rome." "We'll take a chance on that." The full-page ad ran in the *New York Times Book Review*.[1]

Fast's anecdote about censorship during the anti-communist witch hunt in the early years of the Cold War reveals how the forbidden could be expressed by cloaking it in Roman dress. Two interrelated texts use the slave revolt of Spartacus as a way of commenting on American politics and culture during the Cold War: Howard Fast's historical novel, *Spartacus*, and its 1960 cinematic adaptation of the same name by Hollywood actor and producer Kirk Douglas. In Fast's novel, Rome stands for capitalist, class-divided America and the slaves stand for the exploited proletariat. Kirk Douglas's film drew on Fast's novel and on mainstream cinematic tropes of Romans in an effort to offer both a Cold War allegory and a critique of domestic politics. Disagreements over the meaning of Spartacus and the slave revolt among screenwriters, the directors, and the producer, and the intervention of the Hollywood studio that bankrolled the film, however, resulted in a de-radicalized, or at best ambiguous, Spartacus.

The trope of Romans as decadent oppressors enjoyed a resurgence in fiction and film at first during World War II but then increasingly during the Cold War.[2] These novels and films were structured around a polarization inherited from Victorian fiction and then Hollywood films such as those of Cecil B. DeMille that opposed Romans to virtuous Christians, Jews, or slaves. The distinction between Romans and their victims was now mapped onto the political and ideological map of the 1940s and 1950s. The linkage between the Roman past and the geopolitical present was made explicit during World War II when in 1943 Paramount

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re-released DeMille's *The Sign of the Cross* with a new prologue and epilogue.[3] The prologue announced that "Nero thought he was master of the world. He cared no more for the lives of others than Hitler does." The epilogue and the advertising poster for the film displayed a cross formed out of Allied bombers. In 1950s Hollywood historical epics, spectacles of Roman legions on the march, megalomaniacal emperors, and cruel, repressive elites conveyed a tyranny associated with hyperbolic militarism. Romans in *Quo Vadis* (1951), *The Robe* (1953), and *Ben-Hur* (1959), for example, become analogues for Nazis, yet these same Romans could simultaneously become Italian fascists, Soviet communists, or any other externalized tyrant.[4] The symbolic malleability of cinematic Romans, who stand in for Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin, projected onto antiquity an American Cold War discourse that collapsed fascism and communism into one overriding totalitarianism that, reassuringly, would be defeated by the requirements of history.

These projections of imperial Rome also rely on colonial projections in which the audience identifies itself with the colonized or oppressed peoples of imperial Rome. What Maria Wyke has called the "linguistic paradigm" of Hollywood cinema – the casting of British actors as tyrannical, evil, or decadent Romans and American actors as heroic Christians, Jews, or slaves – projects into antiquity British–American colonial history; in Michael Wood's words, "the colonies against the mean mother country."[5] The colonial model further empowers the projections of postwar film epics that make the Roman empire stand in for the tyrannies of the decadent Old World, from which the United States had delivered itself in the recent war and against which it now will defend, in Truman's words, "all free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation" in the Cold War.

President Truman in March of 1947 initiated a Cold War rhetoric that universalized a discourse of freedom and set out a simple, mutually exclusive alternative: freedom or tyranny.

> At the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life. The choice is too often not a free one.
>
> One way of life is based upon the will of the majority, and is distinguished by free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression.
>
> The second way of life is based upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies upon terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio, fixed elections and the suppression of personal freedoms.
>
> I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.
>
> I believe that we must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way.[6]

The National Security Council document 68 (NSC-68) articulated more fully the world view outlined in the Truman Doctrine. This document framed the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union as inevitable and deadly. The

chief of the Policy Planning Staff of the State Department, Paul Nitze, drafted the report to President Truman on national security policy in 1950. It exaggerated the Soviet threat in order to stimulate support for embarking on a worldwide struggle against communism (and tripling the military budget). It divided the world into two powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, a division between "free society" and the "slave state." "There is a basic conflict," Nitze argued, "between the idea of freedom under a government of laws, and the idea of slavery under the grim oligarchy of the Kremlin." The slave state is portrayed as the inevitable result of Soviet ideology. The Soviet Union is "animated by a new fanatic faith, antithetical to our own, and seeks to impose its absolute authority over the rest of the world."[7] Once again in American political history, liberty and freedom are defined in relation to slavery. The trope of freedom versus slavery is deeply rooted in American political ideology and it structured the political discourse of the Cold War.[8] The totalitarian slave state, animated by godless communism, is locked in a struggle for world dominance with democratic, capitalist, Christian America.

In contrast to postwar European nations, there was a major revival of organized religion in America during the 1950s. Over twenty-six million copies of the Bible were sold in 1952–3 alone.[9] When Eisenhower was inaugurated in 1953, the parade of floats representing the 48 states was headed by a float to God.[10] Then in 1954 the words "under God" were added to the Pledge of Allegiance, and in 1956 the House and Senate made "In God We Trust" the national motto. Religion became an expression of Cold War Americanism. President Eisenhower asserted that: "Recognition of the Supreme Being is the first, the most basic expression of Americanism. Without God, there could be no American form of government nor [sic] an American way of life."[11] The new religiosity of the era did not eliminate the need for a strong defense; the threat of communism seemed to necessitate "peace through strength." John Foster Dulles, Eisenhower's right-wing secretary of state, publicly proclaimed that "there is no way to solve the great perplexing international problems except by bringing to bear on them the force of Christianity."[12]

In the prologue to his hugely successful 1956 epic *The Ten Commandments*, the ardent anti-communist Cecil B. DeMille made it clear that the Biblical story about to unfold in his film was directly relevant to the Cold War present.[13] Appearing on screen, DeMille addressed spectators: "The theme of this picture is whether men ought to be ruled by God's law or whether they are to be ruled by the whims of a dictator like Rameses [sic]. Are men the property of the state or are they free souls under God? This same battle continues throughout the world today." The story, he goes on to say, is "the story of the birth of freedom." The struggle of Moses and the Hebrew people against a cruel pharaoh who oppresses his own and foreign peoples is allegorized as a struggle of freedom against despotism, ancient and modern. "There is today as in all ages past, if you read history and the Bible," DeMille intoned,

> there is always the great group who are trying to destroy the belief in God, who say it is the opiate of the people . . . That has been the great battle since Moses and Pharaoh started fighting it, and it is the greatest battle today since Russia and the United States are continuing the battle.[14]

With Nasser's rise to power, his overtures to the Soviet Union, and the Suez Canal crisis looming, DeMille, like Secretary of State Dulles, in Edward Said's words "seemed to be warning Egypt that nationalism not vindicated by God and America was evil and would therefore be punished."[15]

The 1951 Hollywood epic *Quo Vadis* opens with a Roman army marching and slaves, their arms and legs chained, being whipped. A male voice narrates:

> Imperial Rome is the center of the empire, the undisputed master of the world. But with this power inevitably comes corruption: No man is sure of his life, the individual is at the mercy of the state, murder replaces justice . . . Rulers of the conquered nations surrender their helpless subjects to bondage. High and low alike become Roman slaves, Roman hostages. There is no escape from the whip and the sword. That any force on earth can shake the foundations of this pyramid of power and corruption, of human misery and slavery seems inconceivable.

The "inconceivable" unfolds on screen where an implicitly democratic Christianity will triumph over autocratic, pagan Rome. At the end of the film, the Emperor Nero is dead, and the recently converted Roman prefect Marcus Vinicius and his betrothed, the young Christian maiden Lygia, leave Rome to start a new life together. Listing the succession of empires ("Babylon, Egypt, Greece, Rome"), Marcus wonders what will be next. His friend, Fabius, says "A more permanent world, I hope. Or a more permanent faith." To which Marcus adds, "One is not possible without the other." Two thousand years later, the Cold War battle against a godless state that turns its subjects into slaves will likewise be won by Christianity – and American military strength.[16] In the Hollywood historical epic the message is clear: God is on the side of Christian, democratic America.

The Manichean ideology of the Cold War was also played out within the American body politic. As early as 1946, the chairman of the GOP National Committee offered voters a stark choice between "Communism and Republicanism." In 1952, Richard Nixon told the *Kansas City Star*: "There's one difference between Reds and Pinks. The Pinks want to socialize America. The Reds want to socialize the world and make Moscow the world capital. Their paths are similar; they have the same bible – the teachings of Karl Marx."[17] Good old Jeffersonian Republicans, the progressive wing of the Democratic Party, and others on the political left found themselves out of step with the majority of the country and at risk of being labeled Red or Pink. Dissenters, critics, reformers, and political activists were lumped together with real members of the American Communist Party (estimates are that party membership in 1950 was a fraction of the population of the country,

around forty-three thousand out of a population of one hundred fifty million) in a process Michael Rogin has termed political demonology: the creation of monsters through "inflation, stigmatization, and dehumanization." This exaggerated threat of the demonic justifies internal scrutiny and "allows the counter subversive, in the name of battling the subversive, to imitate his enemy."[18] For thousands of American citizens, the tactics of the Senate committee headed by Senator Joseph McCarthy, the House Committee for Un-American Activities (HUAC), the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and other national and local organizations must have appeared uncomfortably close to those employed in the Soviet Union – the country whose policies, values, and tactics were held to be the antithesis of those of the United States.

The blacklisted communist author Howard Fast describes what it was like to live in America during the years 1946–52: "The country was as close to a police state as it had ever been. J. Edgar Hoover, the chief of the FBI, took on the role of a petty dictator. The fear of Hoover and his file on thousands of liberals permeated the country. No one dared to vote and speak against our imprisonment."[19] Fast wrote that during that dark time he and other victims of the McCarthy inquisition "felt a sense of identity with the early Christians; indeed, as we saw it, we practiced a sort of primitive Christianity in emphasizing brotherhood and sacrifice, and the fact that some of us were Jewish and some not made no difference."[20] In Fast's formulation, the tyrannical Romans stand in for the persecuting officials of the American government, and he and other members of the Communist Party were their virtuous victims. We see this again in the 1953 religious epic *The Robe*. The blacklisted scriptwriter, Albert Maltz, cast the Roman Emperor Caligula as a demonic McCarthyesque figure who wants to purge the Roman Empire of "subversives" – that is, of Christians. Marcellus, the Roman soldier who converts to Christianity, is publicly tried for treason at the end of the film.

These subversions of the common meaning of the Roman stereotype help us see how the opposition between Romans and those they oppressed could also be used to dramatize a variety of contradictions, debates, and political oppositions within American culture. To take another example, on the narrative level in the Hollywood epics, the dichotomy between Romans and those they oppress obviates or at least alleviates American imperial concerns. The rejection of a resemblance between imperial Rome and modern America was made explicit in a *New York Times* book review of Michael Grant's popular history book, *The World of Rome*. "It is a study of imperialism, topical for the Free World even though it has abandoned the methods of imperialism," the reviewer wrote, "and certainly relevant to an understanding of the Soviet Union and Communist China where imperialism still flourishes."[21] If, in the 1950s, an American audience, relying on a polarized discourse of freedom versus tyranny, could say, "We are not the Romans," then it could also say, "We are not imperialists."

Howard Fast's Spartacus: Writing as Political Action

While in prison in 1950 for contempt of Congress, Howard Fast thought about Spartacus and his relevance to the class struggle. Spartacus, as we have seen in chapters 2 and 4, has been a malleable symbol of resistance in the United States for labor and working men's movements since the 1830s. Socialist C. Osborne Ward devoted a number of pages to "the last emancipator" in his history of the ancient working classes, and American labor reformers and politicians engaged in struggles against industrial capitalism invoked his name in their speeches and writings. Karl Marx expressed his admiration for him in an 1861 letter to Frederick Engels: "Spartacus comes across as the most excellent fellow in the whole history of antiquity, a great general . . . of noble character, a real representative of the proletariat of ancient times."[22] Spartacus was easily absorbed into Marxist ideology as an ancient avatar of resistance against capitalist exploitation. After the Russian Revolution, Spartacus became an iconic hero in the Soviet Union. In 1916, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht named their Socialist organization the Spartakusbund (Spartacus League). In the last days of 1918, the Spartakusbund became the German Communist Party and Luxemburg wrote its manifesto, entitled the *Spartacus Manifesto*. In early January of 1919, a communist revolt broke out in Berlin, which was ruthlessly suppressed by the German government. Luxemburg and Liebknecht were murdered and the organization crushed. Howard Fast read about Luxemburg in the prison library and found her writing and example inspirational. Fast, a member of the American Communist Party and a prolific writer of politically charged historical novels, decided to write about Spartacus, the leader whom Luxemburg and others on the left admired. Spartacus, he believed, had real relevance for twentieth-century, capitalist, class-divided America. "All my life I have always been intensely interested in the struggles of the poor and of working people against their oppressors. And the fact that Spartacus put together an army of slaves that almost destroyed Rome intrigued me – his name seemed to me symbolic of all the revolts of that kind through history."[23] Fast intended his novel as a call to political action.

Howard Fast was born in 1914, the son of Eastern European Jewish immigrants, and grew up in the slums of New York City. The family was always poor. His father held a number of low-paying jobs and, after his mother died, Howard began his working life at age 10. Beaten by Italian Catholic boys who called him "Christ-killer," he experienced poverty and racism at a young age. "I knew what there was to know about the pain and filth and agony of the mean streets."[24] His discovery of the New York Public Library was transformative and he read "everything." "The walls of books gave me a sense of history, of order, of meaning in this strange world," he wrote later.

> I had seen my father on strike; I had seen him locked out, his head bloodied on the picket line. I had seen the economy of my country collapse . . . I did not have to be instructed about poverty or hunger. . . . all of it worked together to create in my mind a simple plea, that somewhere, somehow, there was in this world an explanation that made sense.

At 16 he read George Bernard Shaw's *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* "and the die was cast."[25] He went on to read Marx, Engels, and Veblen, met members of the Communist Party and other left-wing intellectuals, and, after a trip through the South that he described as a journey "through a society in disintegration," he came to see "that society could be planned and function in another way, called socialism."[26] In 1943, like thousands of other Americans in the 1930s and 1940s, he joined the Communist Party.

Although Fast never went to college, he published a series of commercially successful novels that made him an immensely popular working-class writer. He wanted to rescue the histories and experiences of men and women whose lives had been ignored or misrepresented in history books, and the key theme of his novels was the fight against oppressive power. Fast's first commercial success was *Citizen Tom Paine* (1943), a sympathetic portrait of the revolutionary propagandist of the eighteenth century. *Citizen Tom Paine* was followed by *Freedom Road* (1944), the story of an ex-slave who becomes a senator of South Carolina but is betrayed when Reconstruction fails. Fellow member of the Communist Party W. E. B. DuBois wrote in the preface for the book: "His story is fiction, but his basic historical accuracy is indisputable; its psychological insight is profound." Like many on the political left, Fast was outspoken in his support for the civil rights of black Americans.

In 1947, he produced *The American*, a novel about John Peter Altgeld, the governor of Illinois who pardoned three men convicted of involvement in the 1886 Haymarket bombing in Chicago that had occurred during a workers' protest meeting. That same year Fast gave a passionate speech to commemorate International Workers' Day on May 1, 1947. In it, he gave workers an abbreviated history of May Day, a history that he knew had been left out of the history books:

> They did not tell you in the histories you studied in school how May Day began, but there is much that was noble and brave in our past that the histories carefully blot out. It goes that May Day is a foreign importation, but to the men who made the first May Day in Chicago in 1886, there was nothing very foreign about it. They spun it out of native yarn; their anger at what the wage system does to human beings did not have to be imported.

Fast goes on to describe key moments in labor history: the 1877 Great Railroad Strike, the intervention by militia and government troops, the building of armories to control protests and strikes, the formation of the Pinkerton Agency, the demonizing of communists and socialists through the creation of the "red menace," the

formation of the Knights of Labor, the struggle for the eight-hour day, and the 1886 Chicago May Day marches and the Haymarket bombing in Chicago. Working-class history had been distorted or forgotten, but Fast believed that "organized labor has been the backbone of American democracy." The real enemy of democracy and those who labor was not communism at home or abroad, he insisted, it was America's own capitalist class: "the men of Wall Street, the men of the trusts, the munitions makers, the merchants of death."[27]

In 1946, he received a subpoena to appear with others before HUAC and testify about his support of a Spanish leftist organization's attempts to raise funds to finance a hospital for Spanish Republicans who had fled to France at the end of the Spanish Civil War. Fast refused to disclose the names of contributors and was convicted in 1947 of contempt of Congress. He appealed but was sentenced to three months in jail in 1950. He was also blacklisted, so that no press would publish his books. J. Edgar Hoover sent his agents to Signet Books, which had published some of Fast's earlier books, and instructed it not to sell his books but to destroy the stock. Fast recounted that the communist New York *Daily Worker* newspaper reported the banning and destruction of his books and commented that Signet had just published with fanfare detective writer Mickey Spillane's *One Lonely Night*, in which there was a gleeful mass killing of communists by Mike Hammer.[28] Conservative groups pressured librarians to remove Fast's books from library shelves. In 1952, New York City school officials banned *Citizen Tom Paine* from all school libraries – even though it had once been required reading for high-school students. Undaunted, Fast set up his own press, the Blue Heron Press, in order to publish *Spartacus*. It sold nearly 50,000 copies in the first three months.

Fast also wrote for the communist *New Masses* magazine and for the *Daily Worker* newspaper, and he gave hundreds of speeches and talks. Inspired by the example of Tom Paine and his writings, Fast wrote his own *Crisis Papers* (1951) dedicated to all Americans "who loved freedom and thought independence a cause worth fighting for and, if need be, dying for."[29] Fast was convinced that political action was necessary to overcome "tyranny" in America, which was becoming a "police state" and "a land of terror."[30] In 1952, he ran unsuccessfully for Congress on the American Labor Party ticket. Although in 1957 he, along with the majority of its remaining numbers, left the American Communist party after Khrushchev revealed Stalin's crimes and the Red Army crushed the Hungarian revolution, he never gave up his belief in socialism.

When Fast was released from prison, he re-read from cover to cover a book he had been given as a gift by one of his teachers when he completed his course at the Communist Party training school. The book was C. Osborne Ward's *The Ancient Lowly*. "There I found the story of Spartacus – and became convinced that there was a way to tell it so that it could at least approximate the truth." Years later, Fast, "with great pride," included the book's inscription in his autobiography and wrote: "This I would rather have said of me than all the critical praise my

life as a Communist has denied me: 'To Howard – From the school commission, teaching staff and student body of the national training school, for exemplifying the best type of revolutionary working-class intellectual and showing exceptional solicitude for fellow students.'"[31] After reading Ward, Fast went on to study Latin and immersed himself in researching Roman history: "Morning, noon, and night, I lived in ancient Rome." The result of his efforts would be, he hoped, "an epic of the oppressed and a paean to liberty."[32] Ward's work was still being read by leftists in the 1940s, and his efforts to rescue the history of the ancient working classes bore rich fruit in Howard Fast's novel about the leader of the largest slave revolt in Roman history.

In Fast's novel, when Spartacus is in the gladiatorial school in Capua, he hears of heroic slaves whose deeds electrify him. Crixus, a Sicilian slave, now a gladiator, kept the memory of earlier slave revolts against Rome alive in Capua.

> On many an evening, stretched full length on the floor of his cell, his head near the door, Spartacus heard the story from Crixus of the endless warfare of the Sicilian slaves, which had begun more than half a century before. He, Spartacus, was a slave and born out of slaves, but here among his own kind were legendary heroes as splendid as Achilles and Hector and Odysseus the wise, as splendid and even prouder, though no songs were sung of them. . . . What giants they were! Eunus, who freed every slave on the island and smashed three Roman armies before they dragged him down, Athenion the Greek, Salvius the Thracian, the German Undart . . . Listening, Spartacus would feel his heart swell with pride and joy, and a great and cleansing sense of brotherhood and communion toward these dead heroes would come over him. His heart went out to these comrades of his; he knew them well; he knew what they felt and what they dreamed and what they longed for. Race, city or state had no meaning. Their bondage was universal.[33]

Fast considered himself a story teller – a working-class Homer, if you like – whose craft was to narrate stories that had a political charge.[34] He hoped to galvanize modern American wage slaves into revolutionary action by telling them about Spartacus and the glorious actions of the slave rebels.

In Fast's novel, Rome is defined in terms of an economy based on slavery.[35] Fast's Cicero says about slaves that: "They are always with us, and we are the unique product of slaves and slavery. That is what makes us Romans, if you come right down to it" (39). Slavery is the ultimate form of economic oppression and exploitation, and in Fast's view slavery is also the root of Rome's vices – political corruption, decadence, gluttony, luxury, "unnatural" sex (homosexuality), and the weakening of familial bonds. Romans are parasites, living off the bodies and the labor of the oppressed.

The Romans are cast as capitalists utterly devoted to commodification who "purchase power, death, and pleasure in dizzying amounts."[36] From the socialist point of view, Roman expenditure, symptomatic of a warped economic structure, defines Roman corruption. The capitalist "fetishism of commodities," so repellent

to Marx, is carried to a gruesome and macabre extreme in the Roman fetishizing of the gladiator-slaves. The purchased gladiator-slaves serve Romans and die in the arena for their entertainment, and their bodies are then used by Roman exporters as a form of export sausage-meat. Fast invents the latter practice to turn the Romans into the ultimate consumers. In deliberate contrast to a rhetoric of the Cold War (and its analogues in the Hollywood epics set in Rome) that made the slave state the inevitable result of Soviet ideology, in Fast's novel it is capitalism that produced slavery in ancient Rome and wage slavery in modern America.

In Fast's view, Roman society by the time of Spartacus was unrecognizable as stemming from the society of the early Republic. Roman conquests, dependence on slave labor, and the riches of empire led to the loss of the old Republican virtues of industriousness, living close to the land, discipline, frugality, and temperance.[37] From researching and writing his novels about the American Revolution, slavery and Reconstruction, and labor history, Fast believed that America, like Rome, had lost touch with its earlier republican values. The old virtues and practices that had once defined American society – farming and manual labor, uncontaminated by the corruption of labor and industrial capitalism – had disappeared, replaced by forced wage labor. By the 1950s, the capitalist economy was churning out a dizzying array of unnecessary goods even as the labor unions and the labor movement were being disempowered by the government. Workers were distracted by consumer goods, movies, and television at the same time that they were losing control over their own lives.

In Fast's Rome, the cynical politician Gracchus explained Rome's politico-economic system to the young and ambitious Cicero. It has a very modern sound to it.[38] Rome's unequal distribution of wealth, Gracchus says, is a product of a system that perpetuates inequality. There is an increasing gulf between the rich and the poor. The poor are distracted and entertained by gladiatorial games and other public spectacles. Politicians tell Romans they are free at the same time that they break up workers' organizations and pay pitifully low wages to imported workers (293).

Gracchus is the only Roman in Fast's novel who possesses an ounce of goodness. Gracchus knows Rome is politically corrupt and morally bankrupt. He admits to Varinia, the wife of Spartacus, that "We never talk about how empty our lives are. That is because we spend so much time filling our lives. All the natural acts of barbarians, eating and drinking and loving and laughing – all these things we have made a great ritual and fetish of" (271). He sees that the slaves possess the virtues that Romans have lost, so he helps Varinia escape from Rome. Fast confessed that "through the long months of writing, I had come to love and respect Gracchus . . . Even his name was symbolic and true, for as the Gracchi were the virtue of Rome, so also was fat Gracchus, the politician, who inherited from the Gracchi's downfall."[39] He considered Gracchus like "the rare great politician of the American scene who, for all his corruption, never severs the strings that knit him to the people."[40] Eventually, Gracchus commits suicide rather than

give in to Crassus, who has threatened him with proscription if he does not use his popularity with the Roman people to help Crassus establish a dictatorship. In doing so, Gracchus redeems himself, in stark contrast to the acts of Fast's Cicero.

> Cicero was one of those young men – present in every age – who are capable of shedding every scruple, every ethic, every confusion of current morality, every impulse to ease conscience or guilt, every impulse of mercy or justice which might stand in the way of success. This should not imply that he was not concerned with justice, morality or mercy; he was, but only in terms of self-advancement. (130)

In the *Daily Worker*, Fast wrote "Our battle is not the battle Cicero led, but always the battle Spartacus led."[41] Like C. Osborne Ward, who called Cicero "the most terrible enemy of . . . the working classes," Fast despised him.[42]

In Fast's novel, Crassus, the wealthiest man in Rome, and the general who defeated Spartacus and the rebels, owned a perfume factory and profited by employing foreign workers rather than relying on slave labor. Fast's description of Crassus' visit to the factory was intended to stimulate comparisons between modern American and ancient Roman production and conditions of labor:

> Their litters were carried into the older section of Capua. There the streets became narrower, the tenements higher . . . the tenements climbed up like a crazy jumble of children's blocks . . . The streets were dirty; garbage was dumped from the apartments and allowed to lie until it rotted, and the foul smell of the garbage mingled increasingly with the sweet, sickening scent of the perfume oils . . . "We've tried to run our factories with slaves – but it doesn't work," said Crassus. "You can force a slave to work, but you can't force him not to spoil what he makes . . . So now we hire Syrians and Egyptians and Jews and Greeks, and even they work only until they can save enough to buy citizenship from some ward heeler [worker for a political boss in a ward or other local area] . . . A slave eats your food and dies. But these workers turn themselves into gold. Nor am I concerned with feeding and housing them." "Yet," Caius speculated, "they could do as Spartacus did." "Workers revolt?" Crassus smiled and shook his head. "No, that will never be. You see, they are not slaves. They are free men. They can come and go as they please – why should they ever revolt? There is no bond between these men and slaves." (230–4)

When the Roman elites smashed the workers' guilds, the workers at Crassus' perfume factory did not revolt (231). Fast's moral is clear. Unlike these ancient workers, American workers should recognize their exploited position and resist, taking the ancient slave rebellion as their model. Fast was active in the labor movement when it was under systematic assault by business leaders and the government. The gains the labor movement had made in the 1930s were being dismantled. Fast argued that the US government through its passing of the anti-labor Taft-Hartley Act and the McCarran Act was "fascist" and aimed "to enslave the working class."[43] Like Roman slaves, modern workers should revolt.

In Fast's imagined slave community, the slaves form a community where all things are shared (except women, who remain the "property" of their husbands).[44] All men are equal and form a brotherhood – Fast pointedly lists the multicultural members of the new "tribe": Gauls, Jews, Egyptians, Greeks, Nubians, Sudanese (136). Members of the community call each other "friend" and "comrade." When Spartacus was in the gladiatorial school, he and a black slave were paired to fight a combat to the death for the private entertainment of Crassus and other Roman elites. Rather than fight Spartacus, the black gladiator ran toward the box where the Romans were sitting, intending to hurl his weapon at them, but was killed by guards. The Romans, Fast writes, had no inkling about what made the black man crack.[45] Perhaps borrowing from American slave narratives, Fast writes that the Romans could not understand his mourning for "the house he had by the riverside and the children his wife bore him and the land he tilled and the fruit of the land, before the soldiers came and with them the slave dealers to harvest that crop of human life so magically transmuted into gold" (104–5). During the slave revolt, women fight alongside of men, and all embrace the things the Romans (and modern Americans) have lost: working on the land, communal solidarity, discipline, and hard work. The community functions like a large family with Spartacus as its patriarch.

The empowered ex-slaves win tremendous victories against the Romans. Crassus later admits to the assembled guests at the Villa Salaria just how close the rebels came to overturning Rome. Five Roman armies were "wholly destroyed," Crassus says, and then informs his guests why they failed: "The whole truth is that the mass of the slaves in Italy never joined Spartacus. Do you think if they were made of such mettle we would be sitting here like this on a plantation where the slaves outnumber us a hundred to one?"(174–5). Crassus knows that the reason for their loss was not the overwhelming power of Rome. If others had joined the rebellion, Rome would have been defeated. At the end of the novel, an old woman, weeping in front of the cross that holds a crucified slave, says to Crassus, "Spartacus said to us: Rise up and be free! But we were afraid. We are so strong and yet we cower and whimper and run away" (223). In the midst of the Cold War, a time of repression, inquisition, or persecution of communists and labor and civil rights activists, Howard Fast used ancient Rome to create a Marxist parable for modern Americans: "Workers, unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains!" The novel is a clarion call for revolution.[46]

The Cinematic Spartacus

Hollywood actor and producer Kirk Douglas read Howard Fast's novel in 1957 and was captivated by it. He knew little about antiquity, but seeing the ruins of the ancient world made him think about the slaves who had built those colossal structures.

> I'm always astounded by the impact, the extent of the Roman Empire. Caesarea, Israel – full of Roman ruins. In Tunisia, a coliseum. Roman ruins in England . . . Looking at these ruins, and at the Sphinx and the pyramids in Egypt . . . I wince. I see thousands and thousands of slaves carrying rocks, beaten, starved, crushed, dying. I identify with them. As it says in the Torah: "Slaves were we unto Egypt." I come from a race of slaves. That would have been *my* family, *me*.[47]

For Douglas, the history of slavery and Judaism were intertwined.

Inspired by Spartacus' struggle against slavery, Douglas decided to produce and star in a movie about him based on Fast's novel. Universal Studios agreed to finance his company, Bryna Productions. Douglas hired Anthony Mann to direct the film but soon replaced him with Stanley Kubrick, who finished the film. For the screenplay, Douglas hired writer Dalton Trumbo, one of the "Hollywood Ten" who had refused to "name names" when called to Washington in 1947 by Senator McCarthy. Trumbo had done time in prison and was blacklisted. When released, he was forced to work on film scripts in anonymity. The blacklist was still in effect and, even though its power and influence were waning, Douglas's hiring of a blacklisted writer to write the script for a film based on a novel by another blacklisted author was still a bold act.

Kirk Douglas admitted that his characterization of Spartacus was markedly different from Howard Fast's. Fast's Spartacus had a gentle but powerful magnetism and he was looked up to and admired even before his arrival in Rome. His fellow slaves in the Roman mines in Libya called him Father. Douglas's conception of Spartacus makes the Roman slave "an animal at the start, illiterate, evolving into a man reacting against circumstances, then acting on his own ideas, and becoming a leader" (310). This portrayal may – perhaps unintentionally – reflect Douglas's own life trajectory as constructed in his autobiography, *The Ragman's Son*. In it, Douglas, born Issur Danielovitch, narrates his childhood in a dirt-poor, illiterate Jewish immigrant family in white Anglo-Saxon Protestant Amsterdam, New York, and his subsequent rise from a "ragman's son" to a Hollywood star and producer. In any case, the cinematic Spartacus is a far cry from the clear-cut Marxist hero of Fast's novel. Instead, Douglas's *Spartacus* is the product of ideological wrangling over the "meaning" of the Roman slave rebel and the slave revolt, and of the intervention of Universal Studios in the final cut of the film.[48]

Howard Fast worked with Dalton Trumbo on the script. They wanted to portray Spartacus as the leader of great military campaigns against Rome. To that end they wanted scenes showing the military victories of the slave armies to bring home how close the slaves had come to victory. Kirk Douglas agreed with this vision, but also wanted heightened emphasis on the love story between Spartacus and the slave, Varinia, who becomes his wife. Stanley Kubrick wanted to inject some ambiguity into the slave rebellion and show its violence and the challenge revolutions face in remaining unified and focused. Despite the attempts of Douglas,

Fast, Trumbo, and others to bring in as much of what Trumbo termed the "Large Spartacus" as possible, Universal Studios demanded numerous changes – including rewriting or eliminating a number of scenes, excising shots, and editing and re-editing the film right up to the last moment before its release. Universal Studios wanted a "Small Spartacus," a Spartacus who was the leader of a slave revolt that consisted of a large rabble of disorganized slaves who were put down by only one Roman legion, led by the Roman general Crassus.

It was pressure from the anti-communist right that prompted Universal Studios to intervene in the making of the film. In late 1959, while the production of the film was in progress, gossip columnist Walter Winchell revealed that blacklisted Dalton Trumbo was the author of the screenplay. This precipitated a right-wing attack on the film. Universal Studios head Ed Muhl, who was a friend of Kirk Douglas, explained his position clearly: "Deep ideas are nice to have in a picture. But what counts is audience appeal."[49] Muhl worried about the negative publicity and the real possibility of a financial disaster. The prevailing Cold War consensus claimed that social and political revolutions fail: violent revolutionary action can not succeed. The studio followed this view, and its control over the final cut of the film resulted in the removal of nearly all of the scenes that supported the "Large Spartacus." The scenes of slave armies' victories over the Romans and Crassus' fear of defeat were virtually eliminated. Furthermore, as Alison Futrell has shown, Douglas's emphasis on the love story between Varinia and Spartacus "domesticated" Spartacus by focusing on his role as a husband and father (in keeping with the gender roles and family values of the 1950s), further distracting attention from his political and revolutionary successes.[50] By contrast, Fast's Varinia was Spartacus' partner in the slave revolt and even tortured captured Roman soldiers. But in Douglas's film, she is transformed into an exemplar of the domestic family values evident in other mainstream 1950s epics. Missing, too, in the final cut is Fast's crucial point that the rebellion failed not because of the power of Rome but because the mass of slaves in Rome did not rebel. There is no hint that other slaves did not join the revolt out of fear or weakness. In the film, the slaves are defeated by the overwhelming military might of Rome.

It need hardly be said that the historical Spartacus was untouched by either Judaism or Christianity. Howard Fast's Spartacus had no religion either. But the cinematic Spartacus evokes both Moses and Christ, and the epic conforms in a number of significant ways to the politics and piety of the mainstream religious epics of the 1950s. Spartacus' political acts are occluded. He becomes a patriarchal leader of a migrating tribe and a resigned sacrificial offering prefiguring the ultimate sacrifice of Christ.

Kirk Douglas made no secret of his support for Zionism. He spent time in Israel while making a movie, *The Juggler*, in 1952, and he wrote in his autobiography of his admiration for Israel and the Israeli people:

> As a Jew, it was exciting to be in the land of my ancestors, my heritage. It was exciting to realize that thousands of years ago, my people, slaves to the Pharaoh of Egypt, had been led by Moses through the Sinai and arrived here. The land of Canaan. The land of milk and honey. (203)

Slavery and the historical experience of the Jewish people paralleled each other, Douglas believed, and this conflation of slavery and Judaism – made explicit in each Passover seder – is evident in his film.

The film portrays the slave uprising as an exodus narrative tinged with modern Zionism rather than a political revolution against an oppressive Roman state.[51] In *Spartacus*, the Roman slave rebel becomes a Moses figure, leading his "people" toward the sea that they hope to cross on their way to the Promised Land, a place he will never see.[52] Kirk Douglas plays Spartacus as a patriarchal head of a tribe of former slaves who seek nothing as much as to return home as free men and women. According to Duncan Cooper, "Douglas' eagerness to express his Zionist convictions led him to portray Spartacus as the leader of a mass migration of slaves back to their homes, rather than as a revolutionary who tried to change the world."[53] Film critic Pauline Kael got the message. She commented that the scenes of the slave camp with its shots of families picnicking and everyone sharing and caring for each other resembled "a giant kibbutz on the move."[54]

Exodus was a prominent theme in 1950s popular culture. Jewish writer Leon Uris's immensely successful novel, *Exodus* (1958), was made into a film and released in the same year as *Spartacus*.[55] The novel and the film unabashedly celebrated Zionism and the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. Dalton Trumbo left Bryna Productions early so that he could work with director Otto Preminger on the film script. Preminger's film mixed conventions of the religious epic and the American Western in the portrayal of the birth of the new nation. The creation of the state of Israel becomes a drama set in a new frontier, Palestine. The result, according to one critic, is "a Hollywood Western played out in the desert instead of on a prairie, a tale of brave men overcoming the dangers of a wild frontier to bring law, order, and civilization to a new land."[56] In this Western set in Palestine, Arabs fill the role of the savage "Indians," creating an inversion of the reality of the brutality and violence used against Palestinians (and Native Americans) in the establishment of the modern state of Israel (and the United States).[57]

Exodus is also a modern update of the Cecil B. DeMille Biblical epic *The Ten Commandments*. In DeMille's film, Moses' struggle against Egyptian despotism was allegorized as the modern struggle against the communist Soviet Union and its allies, highlighting allegorically America's prominent role in that struggle. Michael Wood has pointed out that at the end of DeMille's film, Moses (Charlton Heston) is posed to resemble the Statue of Liberty. He walks up a mountainside into the light, turns, and says "Go – proclaim liberty throughout all the lands, unto all the inhabitants thereof."[58] This is a call to and reminder of the American mission

to the world. DeMille gave cinematic expression to a vision of America as the Promised Land, the home and the protector of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

In Uris's novel and in Preminger's film, the creation of the modern state of Israel is linked to the Biblical exodus. An anonymous US State Department official confessed: "*Exodus* revealed what I suspected. The State of Israel is a remarkable revival of the ancient Hebrew nation."[59] This linkage gave the new nation state Biblical legitimacy and it also resonated with America's own identity and mission. As we have seen in chapter 5, since the nineteenth century, Christians from a number of sects and denominations have had a proprietary interest in the Biblical history and archaeology of the "Holy Land." This long-term interest intersects and dovetails with Zionism and American foreign policy after World War II. In reclaiming the Promised Land as a part of the Judeo-Christian tradition and, in contemporary terms, Israel as part of the American sphere of influence, *Exodus* and *The Ten Commandments* contributed to America's economic and foreign policy by claiming the site in the name of God and America.[60] Critics of Leon Uris's novel noted that "it is actually an American book, which portrays Israel through American eyes."[61] *Exodus* made Middle Eastern history into an American epic. Kitty Fremont (Eve Marie Saint), a blonde American Christian (Presbyterian) nurse, will marry Israeli hero Ari Ben Canaan (Paul Newman). The intermarriage, as Deborah Dash Moore points out, symbolizes the future of the relationship between the US and Israel.[62]

The prologue to *Spartacus*, his crucifixion, and the iconography of its final scenes simultaneously allow a Christian reading of the meaning of the rebellion. The film opens with a scene showing slaves under Roman surveillance toiling in the mines under a grueling North African sun. A voiceover intones:

> In the last century before the birth of the new faith called Christianity, which was destined to overthrow the pagan tyranny of Rome and bring about a new society, the Roman Republic stood at the very center of the civilized world . . . Yet even at the zenith of her pride and power, the Republic lay fatally stricken with a disease called human slavery. The age of the dictator was at hand, waiting in shadows for the event to bring it forth. In that same century, in the conquered Greek province of Thrace, an illiterate slave woman added to her master's wealth by giving birth to a son she named Spartacus. A proud, rebellious son, who was sold to living death in the mines of Libya before his thirteenth birthday. There under whip and chain and sun, he lived out his youth and young manhood, dreaming of the death of slavery two thousand years before it would finally die.

This frames Spartacus' life and actions in terms of the arrival of Christianity. As in Lew-Wallace's novel *Ben-Hur* and its recent 1959 cinematic adaptation, the audience is informed that a spiritual revolution (Christianity), not a political revolution (the slave revolt or a Jewish revolt), will overthrow the tyranny of Rome. The actions of the slaves are, therefore, robbed of political significance. The mainstream press had criticized Fast's novel in these terms as well: the reviewer in the

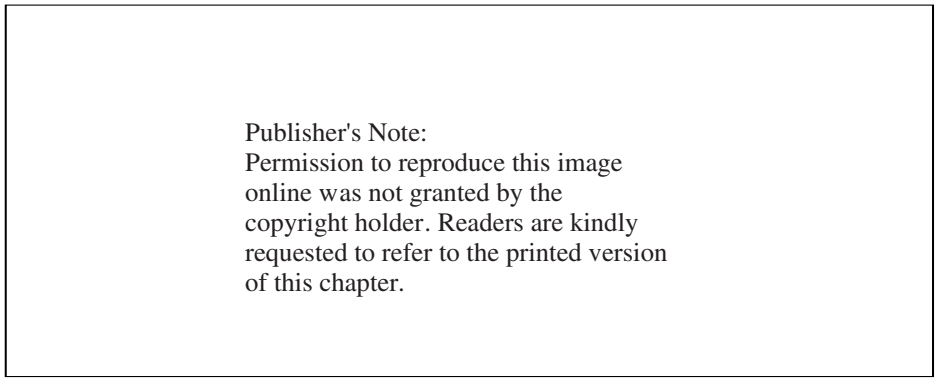
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Figure 8.1 A Christ-like Spartacus on the cross with Varinia and child. *Spartacus*, 1960, dir. Stanley Kubrick. Captured image of film by Margaret Malamud.

New York Times wrote that any "schoolboy would simply refuse to believe that the 'servile' war had an outside chance of success. Or that slaves themselves were equipped to make a slave-free world."[63] Violence is not an acceptable way to freedom and a new and better society.

Contrary to historical evidence and Howard Fast's novel, Spartacus is crucified at the end of the film. As he is slowly dying on the cross, Varinia appears with their infant son, whom Spartacus has not yet seen. She shows him their son and promises him that she will keep his memory alive; his son will know all about his father's heroic actions. She is then hustled away from Rome by Batiatus, whom Gracchus has paid to help her escape. Maria Wyke and others have pointed out that the closing visual tableau simultaneously invokes the Christian Nativity and the Passion (figure 8.1).[64] Varinia is both young mother (Madonna) and grieving mother (*mater dolorosa*). The infant son is the hope for the world, and Spartacus the sacrificial martyr. Freedom and the end of slavery are deferred to another, future era.

The crucifixion scene at the end of Fast's *Spartacus* has a different message. The old woman who weeps in front of the crucified slave laments that she and many other slaves *did not* take up arms and resist their oppressors. The contrast between the crucifixion scene in the novel and in the film encapsulates how Fast's call for revolution has been de-radicalized and transposed into a sentimental, Americanized Christianity.

Douglas's film largely re-inscribes Cold War ideologies about politics and religion. The fight against Roman tyranny as a metaphor for the Cold War battle against Soviet tyranny was widely known and circulated through a series of epic films from 1951 on. Many on the right, therefore, saw Douglas's Spartacus as fighting for freedom against the Kremlin and its allies.[65] The US State Department read the film as a statement about the cause of freedom, and Douglas traveled as a goodwill ambassador for America on behalf of the State Department

and the US Information Agency.[66] The film did, however, manage to make a couple of political interventions that survived the cutting and editing process. It retains and amplifies the role of the black African gladiator in Fast's novel, whom the film names Draba. After Draba refuses to kill Spartacus in an arranged combat and hurls his weapon at Crassus, he is killed and suspended upside down from the roof of the gladiator barracks as a warning against rebellion. This scene evoked in American audiences images of the lynching of black men in the American South. Draba's death becomes a catalyst for the instigation of the revolution and, as one scholar has noted, "the struggle of the black man becomes the visual icon of every man's struggle to be free."[67] The film thus gives a sympathetic response to black activism and the civil rights movement that had developed in earnest in the late 1940s and 1950s.

And, in perhaps the most famous scene of the film, Crassus, who has not yet seen Spartacus, announces that the lives of slaves who identify Spartacus in their midst will be spared. Rather than reveal his identity, the slaves rise up in turn to declare "I am Spartacus." [68] This is clearly a criticism of those who "name names" and the Hollywood studio system that supinely went along with the McCarthy inquisition. It is a public repudiation of the blacklist and HUAC and an acknowledgment of those Americans, including Howard Fast and Dalton Trumbo, who heroically refused to name names.

Shortly after the 1959 Cuban Revolution overthrew the pro-US dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista, the socialist Castro government turned to the USSR for film partnerships. Not surprisingly, Fast's book and Douglas's film were popular in the Soviet Union.[69] The result was a joint Soviet–Cuban film glorifying the Cuban Revolution: *I am Cuba* (1964). In the film a group of rebels are rounded up in the tropical jungles of Cuba and brutal Batista officials demand to know which one of them is Fidel Castro. One by one the rebels answer, in turn, "I am Fidel." Despite the ideological wrangling over the meaning of Spartacus in Hollywood and the production of a substantially de-radicalized cinematic Spartacus, Fast's revolutionary hero of the class struggle endured. A scene in Douglas's film that was meant as a criticism of the internal politics of the United States was appropriated in support of a Marxist revolution that led to the first communist state in the western hemisphere.

Notes

1 Fast (1990), 293.

2 Lloyd C. Douglas's 1942 novel *The Robe* was reprinted in 1943, 1946, and 1956, and was made into a film of the same name in 1953. Henryk Sienkiewicz's novel *Quo Vadis* (1895) was reissued in 1953 after the success of the 1951 film of the same name. The perennially popular 1880 novel *Ben-Hur* was reissued in 1949 and 1959, edited versions appeared in 1954 and 1956, and it was made into a film for the third time in 1959. Thomas Costrain's 1952 novel *The Silver Chalice* was made into a film

in 1955. Par Lagerkvist's 1951 novel *Barabbas* was translated into English by Alan Blair in 1951, reprinted in 1955, and made into a film in 1962. *Demetrius and the Gladiators*, a sequel to *The Robe*, appeared in 1954. The film *The Big Fisherman* appeared in 1959 and *King of Kings* in 1961. This paragraph and the following one in the text are adapted from the introduction to Joshel, Malamud, and McGuire (2001), 6–9. The introduction was co-written with Sandra R. Joshel and Maria Wyke.

3 Babington and Evans (1993), 184, and Wyke (1997), 134–6.

4 For Romans as Nazis, see Winkler (2001b); for Romans as Italian fascists and Soviet communists, see Wyke (1997), 142–3, 145.

5 Wyke (1997), 23,132; M. Wood (1975), 184.

6 President Truman's address to Congress, March 12, 1947.

7 This document is quoted and analyzed in McAlister (2001), 51–2.

8 Furstenberg (2003). Stephanson (2000) traces this trope back to the seventeenth century. See the discussion of the trope in chapters 2 and 3.

9 Biskind (1983), 115.

10 Ibid., 116.

11 Eisenhower quoted in Biskind (1983), 116. Whitfield reports that church affiliation was at its highest of any decade of the twentieth century during the 1950s, at 55 percent in 1950 and at 69 percent by 1959. Whitfield (1996), 83–4. See also Nadel (1995), 92.

12 Dulles quoted in D. T. Miller and Nowak (1977), 91.

13 My discussion of the *Ten Commandments* draws on Nadel (1995), 90–116, esp. 92–4; Wyke (1997), 63; and McAlister (2001), 60–7.

14 DeMille in Pratt (1989), 140–1. Pratt's interview with DeMille was taped in Los Angeles in 1958.

15 Said (2000), 159.

16 In the popular science fiction film *Red Planet Mars* (1952) directed by Harry Horner, God directly intervenes in the Cold War by speaking on the Voice of America to Russian peasants, who are so inspired by the Sermon on the Mount that they tear down portraits of Stalin in their homes. Christians in the Soviet Union replace the Kremlin oligarchy with a new government and churches are reopened.

17 Nixon quoted in Whitfield (1996), 19.

18 Whitfield (1996), 4. Rogin (1987), xiii. Rogin is also quoted in Whitfield, 19.

19 Fast (1996), vii–viii.

20 Fast (1990), 242.

21 Pierson Dixon, "High Noon on the Tiber," *New York Times* (September 18, 1960).

22 Marx (1975), vol. 41, 264–5, and Marx quoted in a review of Fast's novel in the New York *Daily Worker* (February 29, 1952).

23 "Spartacus: An interview with Howard Fast," transcript of June 28, 2000, *AncientSites* chat session discussion with Mr. Fast. When asked about his "harsh" description of Rome, Fast said, "I think . . . history may take the same very dim view of us [the Americans], because, like Rome, we have fought senseless wars and we have done some terrible things to other nations . . . We are currently destroying Iraq and we're responsible for the deaths of thousands of children there, for instance. And we justify all our sins, just as the Romans did. As with Rome, and Great Britain a hundred years ago, we are now more or less the rulers of the world. So it's both ancient history and contemporary history."

24 Fast (1990), 55.
25 Fast (1990), 41–2.
26 Ibid., 61.
27 Fast (1947). In 1958 the US Congress officially designated May 1 as Loyalty Day because of the association of May Day with communism. It is a legal holiday but not a federal holiday.
28 Fast (1990), 296–7.
29 Fast, *Crisis* No. 1, available online, http://www.trussel.com/hf/crisis1.htm.
30 Ibid.
31 Fast (1990), 276–7.
32 Ibid., 276–88, and Fast (1957), 148.
33 Fast (1974), 119–20. All quotations are from this edition. Further quotations will be cited parenthetically in the text. Fast weaves material from Ward's *Ancient Lowly* (1888, 4th edition 1907) into this passage.
34 "I conceive of my own branch of the trade as story-telling. The stories I want to tell have a direct inter-relation – in that they all deal with the struggles of men for freedom." Fast (1944), 7–9.
35 My discussion draws on Futrell (2001), 90–7; Macdonald (1996), 87–8; Wyke (1997), 60–3; and Urbainczyk (2004), 106–17.
36 Futrell (2001), 93.
37 Macdonald (1996), 88–95.
38 Futrell (2001), 93.
39 Fast (1957), 150.
40 But Fast reports that the "commissars" in the Communist Party disapproved: "To them . . . I have exalted a 'capitalist beast,'" and he criticized the "puritanical lunacy that caused certain people to put signs up in their homes: '*There will be no discussion of Spartacus here tonight.*'" Emphasis added. Ibid., 151–3, and Fast (1990), 300.
41 *Daily Worker* (October 26, 1948): 12.
42 Ward pointed out that Cicero was in favor of restricting the organization of working men in Rome even as he was prosecuting Verres, praetor of Sicily, for his rapacity, which Cicero feared might spark another servile war. C. O. Ward (1907), 244.
43 Fast (1951a), no pagination. "There can be no freedom for American workers if the Communist Party is outlawed and the Communist leaders jailed," Fast went on to say. "This meant fascism in Germany and in Italy, and it means fascism here". The Taft-Hartley Act was a bill written by the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) and passed in 1947. Its intention was to weaken the power of organized labor. The Internal Security Act or McCarran Act was passed by Congress in 1950. It established a committee to identify, monitor, and, in times of national emergency, detain left-wing radicals and other politically suspect groups.
44 Futrell (2001), 95.
45 The black gladiator is not named in Fast's novel.
46 The novel did very well. Fast sold nearly 50,000 copies in the first three months and it became one of the most successful self-published novels of the century. When the 1960 movie was made, Fast was able to publish in commercial publishing houses, and the novel remains popular today.
47 Douglas (1988), 304. Further quotations will be cited parenthetically in the text.

48 It is a tangled tale, one that has been unraveled and discussed by a number of scholars, most notably D. Cooper (1974; 1991a; 1991b; 1996) – these last three essays are available online as "Three Essays from *Cineaste* Magazine" at the Kubrick Site, http://www.visual-memory.co.uk/amk/doc/cooperdex.html; Wyke (1997), 63–72; and Futrell (2001), 97–111. I draw on their work in the following paragraphs.
49 Muhl quoted in D. Cooper (1996).
50 Futrell (2001), 102–4.
51 Ibid., 102–4; Wyke (1997), 68–70.
52 Critics have noted that Kirk Douglas's Spartacus has "a Moses-like cast" and aura; see Elley (1984), 110–11, and Wyke (1997), 69–70.
53 D. Cooper (1974), 30. Wyke (1997), 70, also makes this point.
54 Kael (1982), 547.
55 The novel became a best-seller and stayed on the charts for a year, including 19 weeks as number one.
56 Lester Friedman quoted in Moore (2003), 211–12.
57 Some criticized the representation of Arabs, including *Time* magazine: "the picture goes on to sanctify the Jewish terror." *Time* (December 19, 1969) quoted in Moore (2003), 211.
58 M. Wood (1975), 187–8.
59 US State Department official quoted in Moore (2003), 211.
60 Nadel (1995), 90–116.
61 Moore (2003), 210.
62 Ibid., 210–13.
63 Heath, M. "*Spartacus.*" Review. *New York Times* (February 2, 1952): 22.
64 Wyke (1997), 71; Babington and Evans (1993), 194; Cyrino (2005), 113.
65 Wyke (1997), 72.
66 D. Cooper (1991b).
67 Cyrino (2005), 119.
68 This scene has had a long afterlife – spoofed in films from *The Life of Brian* to *In and Out* – and in the 2005 Pepsi commercial, which used actual footage from *Spartacus.* Thanks to Emily Albu and Alan Taylor for pointing this out to me.
69 "Spartacus was a big hit, even in Russia," Kirk Douglas wrote, "They saw it as their revolution, the uprising of the slaves against the masters." Douglas (1988), 334.

9

Imperial Consumption

The grand opening of Caesars Palace in August 1966 realized Howard Fast's worst fears about American capitalism, consumption, and consumerism. The owner and chief designer of the casino-resort, Jay Sarno, wanted "a little true opulence" in the form of a re-creation of the Roman Empire in the age of the Caesars.[1] A Las Vegas newspaper trumpeted its opening with the headline: "Golden Age returns: Roman Empire reborn in Las Vegas," and the three-day grand opening established a mood of excess and extravagant consumption.[2] Over a thousand guests were invited, including Nevada governor Grant Sawyer and Jimmy Hoffa, whose International Brotherhood of Teamsters lent 10 million dollars toward the cost of building the Palace. Hoffa was guest of honor at the opening floor show at the Circus Maximus Supper Club and, according to one employee, his presence added "a little Greco-Roman class to Vegas."[3] At the opening 50,000 glasses of French champagne were poured, two tons of filet mignon consumed, and the largest order of Ukrainian caviar ever delivered to a single party eaten. In Caesars Forum Casino guests gambled and were served free cocktails by employees dressed as gladiators and goddesses; they drank and danced at Cleopatra's Barge Nightclub, a floating cocktail lounge and disco in the shape of an Egyptian ship afloat in a miniature Mediterranean Sea; and they lounged in the landscaped Garden of the Gods, with its marble pool in the shape of a Roman shield. Actor and singer Andy Williams opened the show at the Circus Maximus Supper Club, with its booths in the shape of Roman chariots and walls decorated with Roman shields. Heralded by eight Roman soldiers, the curtains parted to reveal "Rome Swings," a stage full of swinging, gyrating Cleopatras.[4] Many visitors to Las Vegas in the late 1960s might well have shared the sentiments of the *New Yorker* columnist who attended the spectacular opening in 1966: "We think of Nero in Hades, shaking his head in wonder and envy. Rome – his Rome, which he rebuilt with broad streets and splendid villas – was never a patch on Vegas."[5]

In the 1960s, a trip to Las Vegas was associated with glamour, excessive drinking, sex, and gambling. Caesars Palace casino-resort was innovative because it

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Figure 9.1 Caesars Palace, 2006. Photograph by Margaret Malamud.

capitalized on the popular image of the decadence of ancient Rome by creating a themed space in "Sin City" dedicated to the pursuit of illicit pleasures and the chance to strike it rich. Sarno's Palace exploited Hollywood's decadent and opulent Rome by encouraging patrons to fantasize that they were living out cinema's scenes of Roman debauchery. Subsequently, the merging of the entertainment, hotel, and retail industries has resulted in the incorporation of more mainstream forms of consumption and leisure into Las Vegas.[6] Over the course of the 1980s the boundaries between shopping, tourism, and entertainment began to dissolve in Las Vegas and elsewhere across the nation. At the 1992 Forum Shops, a shopping mall located next to Caesars Palace, images of an opulent and elegant imperial Rome promote ever-increasing consumerism and consumption in a Roman-themed consumer space. If, as postmodernist David M. Boje has argued, Las Vegas exemplifies transformations in consumption and consumerism in America, then shifting images of Rome in Las Vegas from the 1960s to the 1990s should help us map and understand the significance of these changes (figure 9.1).[7]

Living Like the Romans at Caesars Palace

Si Non Oscillas, Noli Tintinnare, "If you don't swing, don't ring."
Inscription carved in Latin and English above the entrance
to Hugh Heffner's Playboy Mansion in Chicago[8]

Figure 9.2 Sign invites guests to enter Caesars World. Caesars Palace, 1996. Photograph by Margaret Malamud.

The material splendor and cinematic excesses of Hollywood spectacle films inspired Caesars Palace's owner's vision of Rome. The Rome at Jay Sarno's Palace is the Rome of Hollywood's late Republic and Empire – the Rome of powerful rulers, bread and circuses, and lavish and extravagant displays of wealth. Absent from the 1966 Palace is any hint of the uplifting moralism of earlier 1950s films like *Quo Vadis* (1951), *The Robe* (1953), and *Ben-Hur* (1959), where Romans are depicted as the decadent oppressors of early Christians and Jews. At Caesars Palace Rome signifies the pleasures of excess, with casino patrons encouraged to indulge in the imagined manner of a Hollywood Caesar or Cleopatra, and of the movie stars who played them in film (figure 9.2).

The conflation of Hollywood stars and the Roman imperial elite is strikingly illustrated in the publicity and avid public interest in the production of the 1963

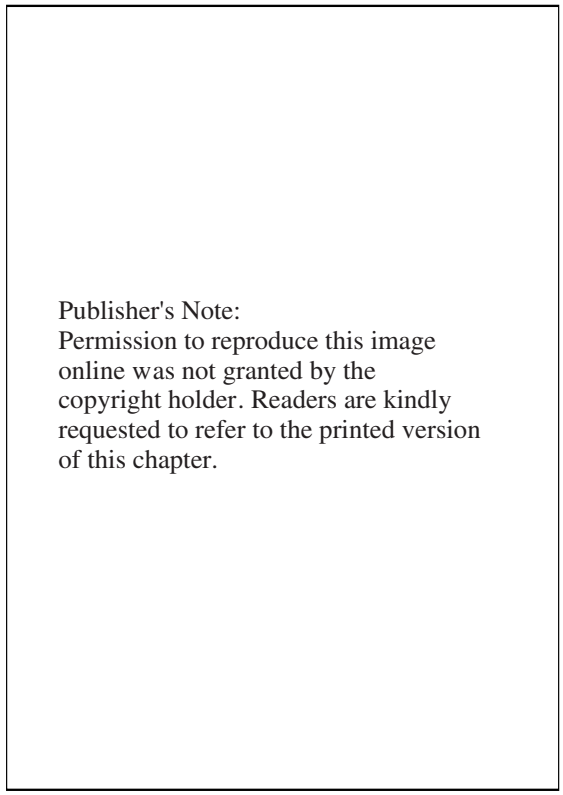
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Figure 9.3 Passionate romance on the screen and off the screen between Cleopatra (Elizabeth Taylor) and Mark Antony (Richard Burton). *Cleopatra*, 1963, dir. Joseph L. Mankiewicz. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation. Film still.

film *Cleopatra*. Many patrons of the original Caesars had seen or at least heard about Joseph Mankiewicz's *Cleopatra*. Mankiewicz's film set the love affair between Cleopatra and Julius Caesar and her passionate romance with Mark Antony against the backdrop of Roman imperial splendor and power. The film was famous for its expenditure, its repeated setbacks, and, most of all, the love affair between its two stars, Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. Newspapers and magazines covered in detail the filming of the movie, particularly the romance between its stars (figure 9.3). There was a deliberate conflation by the media and the public of the historical romance between Antony and Cleopatra with the off-screen romance between Burton and Taylor. As Vivian Sobchack has noted, the epic repeated its narrative outside the film; moreover, the casting of such famous stars in the roles lent magnitude to the representation.[9] The publicists and producers of the film knew that the conflation of Cleopatra and Antony with Taylor and Burton was good business: "I think the Taylor–Burton association is quite constructive," said producer Darryl Zanuck; and the publicist, Nathan Weiss, said: "Everybody, but everybody, will go to see this picture to say that they can see on screen what's going on off it."[10]

Representations of the Egyptian queen Cleopatra have varied from era to era.[11] In the 1917 film *Cleopatra*, Theda Bara played her as a vamp and an exotic femme fatale, and advertisers in the early twentieth century used her to signify luxury and sexual power. In Cecil B. DeMille's *Cleopatra* (1934), Claudette Colbert makes Cleopatra witty, sophisticated, and fully enjoying her sexuality. In the big-spending era of the 1960s, Taylor's Cleopatra signified conspicuous consumption and sexual power: the film features a sumptuous and extravagant lifestyle at Cleopatra's court in Alexandria and in Rome, and both Julius Caesar and Mark Antony enjoy prodigious pleasures with Cleopatra. Publicity and press about the making of Mankiewicz's *Cleopatra* and the lives of its stars mirrored the film's depiction of Roman opulence and excess.[12] Even before the shooting of *Cleopatra* started, the production was notorious for its high costs. Elizabeth Taylor's fee was a million dollars plus expenses; her pleated gold lamé costume used 24-carat gold thread; and the huge Roman Forum that was constructed in the Cinecittà studios in Rome was reported by the film's publicist to be "bigger than the original and about a hundred times as expensive." The life Taylor and Burton led together during and after the movie was "publicly understood to be a perpetual debauch," and they were cast as "moderation's antithesis." Like Cleopatra, Taylor was reputed to lead an extravagant lifestyle. Newspapers and magazines reported that she lived in a villa in Rome faced in pink marble; every evening the cigarette holders, match books, candles, flowers, and tablecloths were changed to match her dress. It was said that she brought 300 dresses with her to Rome and threw each away after one wearing. Richard Burton bought her fabulous diamonds and a private plane, about which he commented: "I bought it so we could fly to Nice for lunch."[13]

Cleopatra harkened back to the glamorous Hollywood of the pre-war era at the same time that it reflected the world of the 1960s. The promotion for *Cleopatra* – and Caesars Palace – plays on the boom-time prosperity, the shifts in sexual attitudes, and the loosening of restraints on self-gratification and the pursuit of pleasure that characterized the 1960s. In translating a cinematic Rome into a marble gambling palace in the deserts of Nevada, Sarno drew on the design techniques and strategies of the glamorous movie theaters, the "dream palaces," popular from the 1920s through the mid-1960s, which showcased Hollywood films. Jay Sarno, like theater managers and designers, was fond of spectacle, stunts, and gimmicks, and he used some of the same strategies the Hollywood studios and theaters used when promoting the spectacular epics set in the ancient world. At Caesars, the show started on the sidewalk.

In 1972, architect Robert Venturi and his colleagues noted in their essential work on the vernacular architecture of Las Vegas, *Learning from Las Vegas*, that Las Vegas, like much of the American West, catered to an automobile culture – architecture was experienced primarily from the vantage point of an automobile passing along Las Vegas Boulevard; the buildings were generally low and non-descript, distinguished from each other only by signs that beckoned at curbside.[14] "One can look at Las Vegas from a mile away on Route 91 and see no buildings,

no trees, only signs," wrote Thomas Wolfe in 1965. "But such signs! They tower. They revolve, they oscillate, they soar in shapes before which the existing vocabulary of art history is helpless. I can only attempt to supply names – Boomerang Modern, Palette Curvilinear, Flash Gordon Ming-Alert Spiral, McDonald's Hamburger Parabola, Mint Casino Elliptical, Miami Beach Kidney."[15] Young Electric Sign Company, *the* neon sign company of the day, designed the original Caesars Palace sign as an Ionic temple, drawing on familiar elements of the classical vocabulary but stretching the idiom to a new context, that of neon roadside signs, and grafting local components of popular culture onto the idiom. When Young's designers bought some toy Roman centurions at a local Woolworths to use for scale in a mock-up of the planned sign, Sarno loved the look so much he insisted that life-size fiberglass centurions and alluringly clad Roman maidens stand by the visually arresting finished sign.[16]

Like the movie dream palaces with their elaborate canopied and carpeted entries, Sarno's Roman Palace was set far back from the street: the long, spectacular entrance was lined with Italian cypress trees and led patrons by towering fountains and a huge reflecting pool. Copies of classical statuary stood in front of the fountains near the boulevard, including a copy of Giovanni Bologna's *Rape of the Sabine Women*, located in front of the original entrance. The reference to the Roman legend of rapine and conquest (which appears again in a frieze inside the Palace) invites fantasies of sexual and monetary conquests (figure 9.4).

Visits to the Palace-casino, like attendance at a movie premiere or a movie palace, offered the public access to a sumptuous realm of desire.[17] As Hollywood director William DeMille, brother of Cecil B. DeMille, observed about movie premieres in the 1930s, the meaning of a premiere lay in the public's wish to identify with and celebrate "those who have helped them find their dream-selves."[18] Movie stars attended the grand premieres and their attendance drew large crowds. The presence of real-life stars at the luxurious theaters offered patrons glamour and a chance to "become part of the show." Like Sid Grauman, the owner of two of the earliest and most influential of these luxurious movie theaters in Los Angeles, the Egyptian Theatre and the even more famous Chinese Theatre, Jay Sarno understood the power of showmanship and the desire of patrons for glamour.

At many movie premieres, employees were dressed in costumes appropriate to the film being shown. At the premiere of the 1951 *Quo Vadis*, for example, ushers were dressed as praetorian guards, and usherettes as Roman "hostesses" and, in one theater, as Vestal Virgins.[19] When Richard Lester's *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* premiered in 1966, United Artists ran a chariot race from Caesars Palace to the Fine Arts Theatre in Los Angeles; and when it premiered in Rome, a party was held at the Colosseum.[20] When the Caesars Palace casino-resort opened in 1966, Sarno hired a plane to fly in from "ancient" Rome employees dressed as Roman goddesses, gladiators, centurions, and Caesar and Cleopatra to greet and serve guests.

Figure 9.4 Frieze of Roman rapine and conquest. Caesars Palace, 1996. Photograph by Margaret Malamud.

In the 1960s and 1970s celebrities were showcased at Caesars Palace, and the chance to glimpse real stars was part of the appeal of the casino-resort to the general public. Caesars attracted Hollywood stars like Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton as guests, and entertainment stars like Dean Martin, Sammy Davis Junior, and Frank Sinatra (often in the press, "the noblest Roman of them all") as performers at the Circus Maximus Supper Club, and the publicity office promoted their visits in advertising displays. Surrounded by displays of opulence, excess, and luxury, patrons were encouraged to identify with the powerful and hedonistic elites of the imperial Roman and Hollywood worlds.

Now, the once striking sign on Las Vegas Boulevard no longer serves as the chief magnet to attract passersby. The sign has been dwarfed by the expansion of the Caesars Palace complex and by the tremendous increase in the number and the size of the casinos along the Las Vegas Strip. Visitors now walk rather than drive along the Strip and many of the new casino-hotels feature spectacles, such as exploding volcanoes or aquatic battles between pirates and naval officers, in front of their entrances to attract pedestrians walking from one themed landscape to another. Although the original 1966 entrance that takes guests into the main lobby of the Palace is still usable, most visitors are now whisked into the complex on "people-movers," that is, moving sidewalks: one leads to hotel registration,

one directly to the casinos, and the grandest (and newest) to the Palace through the 1992 Forum Shops complex.

Today, the most common route takes visitors through the Forum Shops into the Olympic Casino. The progression is mediated, not surprisingly, by a giant, 25-foot statue of the goddess Fortuna (Lady Luck). Adjacent to the Olympic Casino is the original 1966 Caesars Forum Casino. Ringing the casino, which originally housed 30 gambling tables and 250 slot machines, is a series of 20 black Italian marble columns trimmed with white marble and gold leaf. Classical statuary and friezes on the walls depicting scenes from Roman history adorn the casino. Employees dressed as gladiators and goddesses offer guests free drinks. The costumes of the cocktail waitresses are the same today as those designed by Jay Sarno in 1966: white off-the-shoulder mini-tunics and high-heeled Roman sandals. There are also private facilities for high-stakes gambling: the Emperors Club, decorated with portraits of the imperial Caesars, offers privileged guests gambling and round-the-clock services. Caesars Forum Casino was the heart of the original Palace: radiating out from this center were the Circus Maximus showroom, where patrons could see Hollywood stars perform, the Bacchanal Restaurant, and Cleopatra's Barge nightclub.

Caesars has facilities for private parties where guests can arrange their own banquets, including toga parties. In 1986, the annual International Brotherhood of Teamsters convention was held in Las Vegas, and the Eastern Conference of Teamsters hosted a lavish party at Caesars. The cost of the party was around 650 thousand dollars, and several thousand Teamsters and their guests enjoyed an open bar and tables loaded with caviar, crab claws, roast beef, and 15 different desserts. Jackie Presser, who was reputed to have extensive ties to the Mafia and the FBI, was running for president of the Teamsters and staged a grand entrance at the party.[21] Four weight lifters, dressed as Roman centurions with red-plumed helmets, carried Presser into the party on a gold litter (Presser weighed over 300 pounds). As he entered, waving at the assembled Teamsters from his litter, an amplified voice boomed: "Hail, Caesar!" The casting of a candidate for the presidency of one of the largest and most powerful labor unions in the country as Julius Caesar plays with and profits from the reputation of Caesar in Rome and in history as a powerful champion of the people and as a brilliant general whose soldiers loved him.

For non-Teamsters, the grandest dinner experience is provided in the Bacchanal Restaurant, one of the original components of the resort. Like Murray's Roman Gardens in early twentieth-century New York, the setting of the Bacchanal Restaurant was designed to re-create a luxurious Roman villa in Pompeii. The beamed ceiling is blue, so the innermost portion of the room appears to be open to the sky. A huge grape arbor loops from beam to beam of the ceiling, and the walls are frescoed with bucolic scenes and *trompe l'oeil* views of the Mediterranean. In the center is a long pool with a statue of a naked "Vestal Virgin" pouring water, a touch that would have astonished the actual Roman priestesses, who were required

to maintain sexual purity and were always covered from head to foot. Here guests are treated to an imperial banquet. Sarno knew that the Romans offered sacrifices, and intended to start off the feast each night with a sacrifice. In his original plans, he wanted to throw a live pig into the pool filled with piranhas (which might have pleased the Romans), but was dissuaded from this novel idea, so the nightly banquets proceed along more traditional lines. Dinner guests are served a seven-course meal by waiters dressed as Roman centurions and their wine glasses are kept full by scantily clad "wine goddesses." The banquet evokes the Roman orgy – mandatory in cinematic representations of imperial Rome – and, in keeping with Hollywood's depictions of such orgies, the wine goddesses, dressed like extras from a Cecil B. DeMille epic, massage male customers' backs.

Caesar and Cleopatra make an appearance every night at the Bacchanal and each greets the guests. Their costumes fuse Hollywood spectacular with Las Vegas showtime: Cleopatra wears an extravagant gold-bead-and-jewel-encrusted dress and an elaborate plumed headdress (figure 9.5). Not surprisingly, there is a higher

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Figure 9.5 Roman decadence: Cleopatra feeds Caesar grapes. Caesars Palace, 1996. Photograph by Margaret Malamud.

turnover for the role of Cleopatra than for that of Caesar. The key requirements for the job of Cleopatra are "exotic" looks and the ability to fit into the ten-thousand-dollar costume.

In addition to Julius Caesar, the emperors Augustus and Nero are also popular at the Palace. Augustus' statue appears in several forms and locations, most notably in two copies of the Prima Porta Augustus. His sober and pious figure in the Olympic Lounge offers a contrast to the statue of Nero and his lyre with which it is paired. Nero's presence is felt at every turn. A popular steak house bears his name, and his notorious burning of Rome seems to be recalled in the Palace's stationery, the edges of which are treated to appear burned. Nero as the persecutor of Christians, an image popular in such Hollywood films as *Quo Vadis*, is absent; instead, Caesars celebrates Nero as the giver of fabulous parties.[22] This is the Nero of popular legend: the emperor who lived a wild and decadent life, who thought of himself as an artist, and who played music while Rome burned and then rebuilt the city in marble splendor. The representations of the two emperors offer patrons two competing images of imperial Rome: the decadent but exciting Rome of Nero and the well-ordered Rome of Augustus. Jay Sarno may well have identified himself with both emperors – with the indulgence and excess associated with Nero together with his sumptuous rebuilding of Rome, and with the achievements of Augustus, especially Augustus' imperial building projects. Augustus claimed to have found Rome a city of mud-brick and left it a city of marble, while Sarno built a marble palace and casino empire in the sands of Las Vegas.

Luxurious hotel suites offer another place to view lavish reconfigurations of Rome. Each of the 14 so-called Villa Suites is named after a notable Roman: Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome; 10 of the 12 emperors whose biographies are by the second-century Roman author Suetonius; Marcus Aurelius, who ruled after Suetonius wrote; and Mark Antony, who was neither a founder nor an emperor. Here famous Roman figures are invoked to name places where guests experience what they can imagine are Roman luxuries. The art deco, Hollywood-moderne decor creates a sumptuous atmosphere where guests can lounge on round beds under mirrored ceilings, sip wine in a private bar, or soak in sculpted "Mae West" bathtubs. The Villa Suites are set around the main pool area known as the Garden of the Gods. This oasis in the Nevada desert is landscaped with flowering vines, trees, classical statuary, fountains, and a huge, shield-shaped pool. Water is the Olympian element in the deserts of Nevada, and huge displays of water are part of the spectacular excess of Caesars Palace; the casino-resort uses over 240 million gallons of water a year.

The Roman Fantasy Suites are associated with Augustus, the first emperor, and each suite specifically invokes Augustus' pre-destined greatness through a fiber-optic display in the living room ceilings designed to "recreate the night sky as it is believed to have looked on the evening of the birth of Caesar Augustus."[23] These suites are located on top of the Olympian Tower, and are accessible by the

wonderfully didactic elevators that teach waiting passengers about the various Olympians who live on the twenty-second floor. The brass doors of these elevators are engraved with representations of the Olympian gods and inscribed with their names and functions. The 10 Fantasy Suites are two-storey, 4,500-square-foot apartments reserved exclusively for Caesars Palace's most important guests (in the words of the press kit, "celebrities, members of royal families, casino customers, and the like").

Jay Sarno famously claimed he wanted every visitor to his Palace to feel like a Caesar or a Cleopatra. This, in fact, is the reason why there is no apostrophe in Caesars. He believed the possessive would signify a place for only one Caesar, whereas he wanted every visitor to feel sovereign. Sounding like the nineteenth-century entertainment entrepreneur P. T. Barnum, Sarno claimed: "It's not a place of one Caesar. It's a palace for all the Caesars, and a palace for all of the people. We wanted to create the feeling that *everybody* in the hotel was a Caesar."[24] Caesars collapses the historical specificity of individual emperors into one mega-emperor; what matters is the category of emperor. Howard Hughes, owner of a number of Las Vegas properties, including the Desert Inn, the Frontier, the Silver Slipper, and the Landmark, offered this comment in 1966 about Las Vegas: "I like to think of Las Vegas in terms of a well dressed man in a dinner jacket, and a beautifully jeweled and furred female getting out of an expensive car. I think that is what the public expects here – to rub shoulders with VIP's and stars."[25] At Caesars, guests not only rubbed shoulders with stars, they were encouraged to imagine that they were stars. Sarno's populist rhetoric ("Everybody is a Caesar") speaks to one version of the American Dream: it offers each guest the chance to transcend economic constraints and class barriers. At Caesars Palace, every person can be a Caesar for a day, a peculiarly American conflation of democracy and aristocracy.[26]

Caesars capitalizes on what historian of American advertising T. J. Jackson Lears has called fantasies of utopian abundance, by which Lears means the desire for freedom from the obligation to work, for effortless plenty, and for transformation through consumption.[27] All are made to seem accessible to the privileged guests of the casino-resort. The principal designer of the resort's Fantasy Suites, Aram Stepanian, said about them: "I wanted to design a suite that could trigger the imagination, transferring a guest through time and space. For a few hours, you feel that you have been chosen by the gods."[28] Surrounded by a promotion and promise of opulence and luxury, visitors are encouraged to spend and lose their money; the obliteration of reality makes spending money pleasurable.

Las Vegas unabashedly celebrates imperial consumption and excess. The American investors, designers, and builders of Las Vegas's empire in the sands are implicitly associated with the ancient Romans who constructed edifices like the Colosseum, and, more fantastically, with the spectacular sets of Hollywood's Romes. In his analysis of Hollywood epics set in the ancient world, Michael Wood suggested that the lavish expenditures and displays of excess in these films are a

metaphor for Hollywood itself; in particular, for Hollywood's capacity to duplicate and rival past splendors.[29] Casino developers, like Hollywood moguls and indeed the ancient Romans themselves, are big builders whose colossal building projects express an imperial self. In 1966 Las Vegas entertainment entrepreneurs could claim victory over Hollywood in the arena of spectacle. Caesars Palace demonstrates Las Vegas's and Jay Sarno's ability to conjure up and supersede the fabled magnificence and decadence of Hollywood's Roman Empire in the deserts of Nevada.

At Caesars, architecture and interior design engage all senses: the visitor is not simply a spectator but a participant in its projections of imperial Rome. Informed by other artifacts of popular culture's Romes, Las Vegas also collapses them. The invitation to become like the Romans within the confines of the casino-hotel is mediated in part through an assimilation that identifies the Roman imperial elite with film and entertainment stars. Moreover, and crucially, here the typical association of imperial Rome with luxury and decadence translates into a particular economy of spending. Fully immersed in sights, sounds, and sensations, the patron participates in Roman conquest and luxury by spending money in the casino, restaurants, and hotel. In effect, Caesars translates the conquest and wealth of empire into guests' own expenditures.

Consumerism as Civics in the Roman Forum

On May 1, 1992, the Forum Shops, a Roman-themed shopping mall, opened on the Strip in Las Vegas. Its financial backers, banking on the continued success of Caesars Palace, commissioned Los Angeles-based Dougall Design Associates to design an upscale shopping center that would recreate the experience of ancient downtown Rome.[30] The result is an interior space that sets approximately seventy luxury shops and restaurants in a context of Roman façades and streetscapes, under an ever-changing Mediterranean sky (light continually changes from dawn to night over the course of an hour and a half in the Forum's faux skies). "Your typical Roman via," art critic Aaron Betsky reported at the grand opening in 1992, "where the sun sets and rises on an electronically controlled cycle, continually bathing acres of faux finishes in rosy hues."[31] At the Forum Shops imperial Rome now provides a themed urban landscape for consumerism and the Forum serves as a carefully designed transhistorical showcase for commodities.

The reinterpretation of classical motifs at the Caesars Palace complex has put an ever-increasing value on realistic effects and authenticity, what architect Alan Hess has called "archaeological correctness."[32] The Forum's streets are made of quarried stone; retail stores are housed in two-storey buildings in Mediterranean burnt-orange and pastel colors; the carvings, grill work, and lamps of the stores are careful reproductions; the frescoes are copies of Pompeiian originals; and most of the statues are replicas of classical statuary, copies of Roman copies of

Greek originals. Terry Dougall and Michelle Head, the Los Angeles architects and designers of the Forum Shops, said that their intention was to "transport" the visitor to Rome, and to "achieve total authenticity of history." They claimed that "we would do nothing unless it had a precedent in history. If we couldn't document it we wouldn't do it."[33] Indeed, they assured interviewers that they had spent six months researching ancient Rome.[34]

Dougall, who has been called a modern Walt Disney, has admitted an element of fantasy in his creation: "There's a Disney quality about the Forum Shops. It's entertaining as well as awe-inspiring."[35] And: "It's a 2,000 year journey through ancient Rome with all the elements of theatre, animation, sound and retail. It's the best of yesterday and today under one roof."[36] Here the designers acknowledge that "what we've done is to create a theatrical reality."[37] Cinematic spectacle and Disney-inspired entertainment shape the mall's representations of Rome. An artfully composed historical ambience is purposely mixed with entertainment and fantasy to enhance the experience of entering the Roman world.

The journey is designed to begin from the Quadriga statue street entrance on the Strip, which leads visitors directly into the simulated center of classical Rome. The Quadriga statue – four gilded horses and a charioteer – beckons visitors through a series of consecutive triumphal arches of increasing scale, encapsulating in short order the ongoing process of Roman conquest and at the same time psychologically preparing the visitor for the conquests to be achieved once inside (figure 9.6). Visitors soon come upon the Festival Fountain Plaza, where they are entertained by statues of Roman gods who give a seven-minute, special-effects-filled performance every hour. The special effects include music, audio animatronics, lasers, scenic projections on the domed ceiling, theatrical lighting, and computer-controlled waterscape effects.[38] When Bacchus speaks, already slightly tipsy, he urges visitors to indulge and consume, and consumption, of course, is the point of the elaborate simulation and display of the Forum Shops.

Visitors then proceed along the longest of the streetscapes in the mall toward the central piazza, along the stone-paved street lined with the wrought iron lamps and carved doorways and windows of two-storey buildings that house increasingly expensive retail stores. The "center of town" is the Fountain of the Gods piazza, graced by a huge fountain with statues and cascading waterfalls and with a Temple of Neptune beneath a huge dome. Fountains with their spectacular displays of water are a key design element in the Forum Shops. This expensive part of town offers dining at Wolfgang Puck's Spago restaurant and shopping at Louis Vuitton (its roof top adorned with statues of Roman senators) or at Gucci (housed in a temple with a statue of the goddess Minerva on top) (figure 9.7).

The "finale" is the Fortuna Terrace and Rotunda, "which features the elegance and opulence of true classical Rome," and includes a further selection of expensive stores on the approach to the Terrace. Among those is the Christian Dior shop, which, like Gucci, is also presented as a temple (figure 9.8).[39] On the Terrace, the goddess Fortuna rises 25 feet from a marble platform surrounded by pillars

Figure 9.6 Triumphal arches, entrance to Caesars Palace complex, 1996. Photograph by Margaret Malamud.

of colored marble and recessed arches framing reproductions of classical statuary. The journey ends when participants pass through yet another set of triumphal arches into the Caesars Palace casinos and resort.

In the midst of this simulated authenticity one also finds what architect Charles Jencks has termed double-coding in postmodern architecture:[40] at the Beyond the Beach store, LA-style palm trees reflect ironically and self-consciously on the Ionic columns that frame the store; at the Festival Fountain Bacchus looks more like actor Rodney Dangerfield in classical costume than the Greco-Roman god; and at the Warner Brothers Studio Store (the sign reads "Warnerius Fraternius Studius Storius"), statues of Bugs Bunny, Wile E. Coyote, and Porky Pig copy the dress code set by the senators and athletes atop nearby roofs. The classical architectural

Figure 9.7 Gucci temple at the Forum Shops, 1996. Photograph by Margaret Malamud.

Figure 9.8 Christian Dior at the Forum Shops, 1996. Photograph by Margaret Malamud.

references and the statues of cartoon characters on the front of the store recall, perhaps deliberately, the 1986 Disney Headquarters in Burbank, California, designed by Michael Graves, with its infamous Seven Dwarves caryatids. This double-coding (a mix of irony, high and low cultural references, and camp) reflects a sense of humor on the part of the various architects and designers connected with the Forum Shops project – it would be impossible to maintain the illusionism of the Caesars Palace complex without occasionally acknowledging the fiction of it all.[41] Such references also remind patrons that gratification and entertainment are what the complex offers, not the realities of urban life: what is promised is wish-fulfillment and escape from reality.[42]

The merging of the film, entertainment, theme park, and retail industries since the 1960s has given rise to a new kind of themed architecture in Las Vegas and elsewhere – an architecture that responds to the public's desire for historical reproductions and tableaux, entertainment, and novel retail experiences. A combination of historical reproduction, cinematic special effects, and playfulness characterizes the architecture and interior design of the Forum Shops and other themed environments springing up along the Las Vegas Strip and across the country. The epicenter and laboratory of theming is the Strip, where casino-hotels offer an array of sets and landscapes for dramaturgical narratives and participatory adventures. The pyramid-shaped Luxor casino stages a trip to ancient Egypt; at the electric-green MGM Grand visitors follow Dorothy's yellow brick road to Oz; and New York, New York, provides Coney Island rides, Manhattan skyscrapers, and an enclosed Central Park. The Forum Shops offers a trip to the civic center of ancient Rome.

Like Disneyland, which offers an antidote to the dystopia of the greater Los Angeles area in which it is now embedded, the recreation of a traditional Mediterranean urban center within contemporary Las Vegas offers a kind of retro-utopian (and pre-automotive) vision of urban life. The simulated city center is the antithesis of the real city of Las Vegas and it provides a welcome contrast to it. In the place of the arid, sprawling city of Las Vegas is a civic center of intimate streets, small-scale façades, piazzas, fountains, and small restaurants. Unlike most other sites on the Strip, the Forum Shops is also a popular destination for residents of Las Vegas. What the Caesars Palace complex now offers is a themed civic center, with its own squares, parks, restaurants, shops, and hotels. The result is pleasing but deceptive: as Michael Sorkin has said about Disneyland's fabricated American towns and cities, the mingling of history and fantasy provides a simplified and sanitized experience of the complexities of a real city.[43] Like that of the 1893 White City in Chicago, the success of Disneyland and of the Forum Shops depends on shutting the real world out, on not allowing in any of the problems or realities of contemporary urban life.

It is precisely this selective simulation and simplification, however, that the designers and owners of theme malls and parks in Las Vegas (and elsewhere) seek; moreover, they claim that the simulation is better than the real thing. For example,

Steve Wynn, who owns the nearby 475-million-dollar Treasure Island resort and the one-billion MGM Grand, one of the largest hotels in the world, says about his new South Pacific-themed restaurant Kokomos: "Kokomos – this is better than Hawaii. There's no place in the South Pacific where the light is so perfect, so beautiful."[44] Like Walt Disney, many of these contemporary designers and entrepreneurs are interested in improving the past or another place rather than reproducing them. As one of the Disney "imagineers" (as the designers at Disney style themselves) said about Main Street at Disneyland: "This is what the real Main Street should have been like."[45] And, according to another: "What we create is a 'Disney Realism,' sort of Utopian in nature, where we carefully program out all the negative, unwanted elements and program in the positive elements."[46] Michael Eisner, former CEO of the Walt Disney Company, acknowledges that "perhaps there never was and maybe never will be a Disneyland" and that it offers "an idealized version of the city."[47] As Sorkin has noted, visitors prefer the simulation to the reality: "Disneyland is just like the world, only better."[48] In a similar spirit, the twentieth anniversary commemorative issue of the Caesars Palace magazine boasted: "Caesars Palace is an incredible simulation of ancient Rome. Only better."[49]

But what precisely does Rome signify at the Forum Shops? And how are images of Rome being used to sell products? Retail has always used design (and to a certain extent entertainment) to market products, but as Sharon Zukin has pointed out, since the 1980s design has increasingly been used to shape the whole space of consumption.[50] The visual organization of consumption around a Roman theme serves to intensify a commodity's power of seduction.

Whereas the thematics of Caesars Palace refer to exploitation and oppression and capitalize on the myth of a hedonistic and decadent Rome, the simulated civic center invokes an elegant and opulent Rome where consumption becomes an edifying "cultural" activity. In contrast to the overt eroticism and titillating cruelty that characterize the design of the Caesars Palace casino – with its friezes of rapine and conquest and costumed servers standing in as slaves (in the 1960s, the scantily clad cocktail goddesses were instructed to say "I am your slave" and respond to drink orders with "Yes, master") – the Forum Shops' piazzas, fountains, designer shops, and upscale restaurants clad with a Roman façade conjure up an orderly, refined, harmonious urban world. There are no masters and slaves here, and no hint of sexual violence or exploitation. Instead, patrons and spectators at the Forum Shops encounter a Rome that mirrors the values, aspirations, and lifestyles of wealthy elites and the middle classes who emulate them. Roman references confer status and tradition on commodities, and they offer a consumer-oriented ideal in an idiom of Roman luxury. Shopping is also enhanced by an ambience that speaks to a long-established use of the classical tradition in civic architecture. The architecture and design of the Forum Shops play with and profit from a tradition of using Roman architecture to signify grandeur and civic magnificence. Part of the appeal of the Forum Shops is that it evokes an imagined, vanished urban world

of wealth, power, privilege, and civic order, similar to the way that the designers of the White City (and later the City Beautiful movement) used neoclassical architecture to evoke the splendors of Rome for the 1893 Columbian Exhibition. The use of representational forms and styles from the classical tradition secures a turbulent present by tying it to the imagined security and traditional order of ancient Rome, and of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American cities that adorned themselves in classical dress.

In Las Vegas an economy of spending is projected onto the luxury-loving, big-spending, consumption-oriented Romans. The American way of life – shopping as expressive individualism – went into high gear in the post-World War II period, and consumerism has become the most important way that Americans articulate and express themselves – their tastes, status, aspirations, and pleasures are signaled and satisfied through consumer purchases and consumption.[51] The use of Roman images by the designers and promoters of the Forum Shops to signify leisured, secure, and elegant lifestyles for the purposes of consumer sales fits into a movement of aristocratic invocation in 1980s and early 1990s American culture, one that Debora Silverman has linked to the cult of visible wealth and display of the Reagan era.[52] Silverman has explored the interrelationship between fashion, consumerism, politics, and high culture as revealed in exhibitions arranged by Diana Vreeland, editor of *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*, at the Metropolitan Museum of New York's Costume Institute; in the elaborate displays at the Bloomingdale's store in New York that marketed goods associated with those exhibitions; and in Reagan's political spectacles, especially the presidential inaugural events. Her study shows how representatives from the worlds of the department store, fashion design, the museum, and the media selectively appropriated images from the historical past, specifically aristocratic material, as images for consumer sales.

In the early 1980s Bloomingdale's launched two major marketing campaigns centered on aristocratic themes, the first focused on imperial China, the second on France's Old Regime. As Silverman points out, the image of China that the designers fashioned and honored was of pre-industrial China, an aristocratic and pre-revolutionary China dedicated to handicrafts and refined living.[53] As with the China display, the France that Bloomingdale's invoked and refashioned was hieratic: it was the France of the three absolutist kings Louis and their aristocratic coteries.[54] What was honored and celebrated was the wealth, the privilege, and the elitist spirit of the Old Regime aristocracy.

In 1981, shortly after the close of Bloomingdale's China display, the Metropolitan Museum's Costume Institute opened the exhibition organized by Diana Vreeland, "The Manchu Dragon: Costumes of China, the Ch'ing Dynasty, 1644–1912."[55] Like the presentation of China at Bloomingdale's, China at the Costume Institute was refashioned as a splendid aristocratic civilization dedicated to artistic crafts. Later that same year, Vreeland turned her attention to the French aristocracy, and her exhibition devoted to the "Eighteenth-Century Woman" opened at the Costume Institute. The focus of the show was on aristocratic women, especially

on the wives and mistresses of French kings. At this exhibit, the eighteenth century was glorified as a period of elite luxury and refinement, an era when the art of living well was practiced to perfection.[56]

History is clearly distorted at the Metropolitan shows and the displays at Bloomingdale's. As Silverman observes, for those affiliated with these institutions (the designers, promoters, financial backers, and their cohorts), "aristocracies are not a diverse elite, specified by their national and historical locations, but an undifferentiated vision of surface luxury, opulence, and dedication to 'the good life.'" [57] She goes on to note that representations of aristocracies in this manner celebrate wealth and privilege and encourage consumerism. The manipulation of the cultural resonances of Rome at the Forum Shops to promote and legitimate wealth and the pursuit of self-gratification fits into the trend analyzed by Silverman. The fabricated Rome of the Forum Shops aims to offer an elegant and tasteful vision of imperial Roman and American affluence.

Similar invocations of empire and celebrations of wealth, power, and aristocracy are evident in popular literature, TV serials, and films since the 1980s. For example, the BBC productions of Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1981) and Paul Scott's *The Raj Quartet* (*The Jewel in the Crown*, 1984) and the film versions of E. M. Forster's novels (*A Passage to India*, 1984; *A Room with a View*, 1985; and *Maurice*, 1987), other Merchant and Ivory films like *Heat and Dust* (1983), and Colleen McCullough's novels chronicling the end of the Roman Republic (*The First Man in Rome*, 1990; *The Grass Crow*n, 1991; *Fortune's Favorites*, 1993; *Caesar's Women*; 1996; *Caesar: Let the Dice Fly*, 1997; and *October Horse: A Novel of Caesar and Cleopatra*, 2002) all use extensive research into the minutiae of life to dwell in detail on the intricate relations among the upper classes and the luxury, elegance, and commodities of empire.[58] As Renato Rosaldo has noted about some of these texts, the mode of perception is elegiac and the mood nostalgic; and Salman Rushdie has denounced them as attempts to refurbish the image of empire, forming the aristocratic counterpart of the rise of conservative ideologies in modern Britain.[59]

Since the 1980s museum exhibitions, advertising, films, literature, and TV have nostalgically recreated imperialist eras in their corrupt splendor. Not only do these representations collapse the historical specificity and diversity of ancient and modern empires, they also sanction and even glamorize the contemporary exploitative behaviors of America's corporate elites. In Las Vegas's recreation of the Roman Forum, the ostentatious wealth and power of corporate raiders and entrepreneurs like Donald Trump are held up as desirable and obtainable, and consumption and consumerism are presented as historically and culturally valued ways of fulfilling desire. In late twentieth- and twenty-first-century consumer capitalism, evocations and images of Rome participate in the construction of consumers' desires.

A number of scholars have explored the relationship between commerce and culture in analyses of a new urbanism that has emerged in American cities, in malls, pseudo-historic marketplaces, gentrified neighborhoods, and corporate enclaves;

an urbanism that is transforming traditional public spaces.[60] The popularity of pseudo-historic restorations and tableaux of past urban experiences reveals a desire for authentic memories and city experiences; these simulations testify that something valuable has vanished from present cities. The Forum Shops embodies much of what critics of the new urbanism see as threatening to the character of traditional public spaces. Unlike the old downtown public shopping centers where political gatherings, including speeches and assemblies, were permitted, the Forum Shops is private property and entry can be controlled by its owners.[61] The mall is policed. The rights of free speech and assembly that exist in the public spaces of communities are not applicable on private property. The Roman-themed mall and other sites like it thus present simulations of and references to the kind of traditional urban public and democratic forms and spaces that they are in the process of obliterating.

Seven, the magazine of the Caesars Palace complex, bluntly acknowledges the key difference between the function of the forum in ancient Rome and its function in Las Vegas: "The Roman forum was the center for all ancient political and religious ceremonies . . . but the Appian Way [shopping arcade adjoining the Forum Shops], on the other hand, is the center for the great *American* ceremony: Shopping."[62] The ancient Roman Forum symbolized the unity of the Roman people and was where Romans conducted their affairs as citizens. Lawyers argued their cases, merchants and bankers negotiated deals and loans, and religious observances were conducted. Citizens heard orators address them from the Rostra, the speaker's curved platform, which stood next to the Curia, where the Senate met. Nearby stood the temple of Castor and Pollux, in front of which tribunes would debate and vote on laws. The Forum was where Rome's citizens' liberties and values were expressed. Las Vegas's Forum empties the ancient Roman Forum of its political and religious meanings. Its advertising acknowledges what has happened in the United States: the meaning of citizenship has become consumerism. The consummate evocation of consumerism as patriotism was given by President George W. Bush in 2001. Shortly after the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York City and on the Pentagon, President Bush advised anxious Americans to express their patriotism by shopping to help the country recover from the trauma of 9/11.

If we look back to the Revolutionary generation's invocations of ancient Rome we find an admiration for the Roman Republic and the virtues of austerity, political engagement, and sacrifice for the greater good. That imaginary Rome was largely eclipsed by c.1900, when Americans openly celebrated the acquisition of wealth and empire through utilizing imperial Roman symbols and analogies. Las Vegas's Roman Forum takes this further by encouraging visitors to identify with and imitate imperial Roman decadence, excess, and opulence. In the 1960s, Caesars Palace exploited the stereotypical image of a decadent imperial Rome to promote gambling, sexual license, and excess. In the 1990s, the Forum Shops capitalized on the fact that for many Americans participation in democracy and

the civic realm has been replaced by an investment of desire in objects rather than in social interaction and political engagement.[63] Participation in politics and the sociability afforded in traditional cities and urban spaces are not what the civic center at the Forum Shops offers. The simulated Roman Forum caters instead to the culture of consumption: it is a site for shopping, eating, and drinking.[64] In contemporary Las Vegas, civic life itself is themed for the purposes of consumption and consumerism.

Notes

1 Jay Sarno conceived the design for the Palace, and Miami architect Melvin Grossman was the chief architect for the casino-resort.
2 *Las Vegas Review* (August 4, 1966).
3 *New York Times* (August 14, 1966).
4 Descriptions of the gala opening can be found in "Roman splendor to amaze hotel guests." *Las Vegas Sun* (August 5, 1966); and Hevener (1991), 20–1.
5 *New Yorker* (August 20, 1966): 26.
6 See the discussion by Ritzer and Stillman, (2001), 83–99, esp. 92–3.
7 "Las Vegas of the 1960s is not the Las Vegas of the 2000s. Las Vegas is the Postmodern City of Casinos and Simulation, emblematic of a transformation of the spectacle of production and consumption that is being globalized. Las Vegas, long the casino gambling capital of America, began to go through a transformation in the late 1980s that revealed what much of postmodern America is becoming." Boje (2001), 79–82.
8 Wolfe (1968), 4.
9 As Sobchack (1990), 35, put it: "consider how Taylor and Burton's illicit extratextual romance – and their magnitude as stars – mimicked the historical situation of the text in which they were imitating Cleopatra and Antony and extended the produced History of the past into the present moment of historical production."
10 Quoted in Hughes-Hallett (1990), 292.
11 Ibid.; Hamer (1993) and Wyke (1997), 73–109.
12 Hughes-Hallett (1990), 287.
13 Ibid., 288–91.
14 See the influential work by Venturi, Brown, and Izenour (1977), esp. 34–72. On changes in American strip architecture since the 1968 visit of Venturi, Brown, and Izenour, see Izenour and Dashiell (1990). See also Hess (1993).
15 Wolfe (1965), 8.
16 Hess (1993), 86–7.
17 For a study of the architectural history of the movie theater (with an extensive bibliography), see Valentine (1994). See also Nasaw (1993), 221–40, and L. May (1980), 151–63.
18 W. C. DeMille (1939), 89.
19 The MGM press book for *Quo Vadis* contains a number of pictures and instructions for theater managers on how to stage openings. Thanks to Ned Comstock of the University of Southern California film library for gathering materials for me. For usherettes as Vestal Virgins, see Babington and Evans (1993), 9.

20 *Hollywood Reporter* (September 8, 1966).
21 Neff (1989), 416. Thanks to David Myers for this reference.
22 For a survey of representations of Nero from antiquity to the present see Elsner and Masters (1994); for the image of Nero in film see Wyke (1997), 110–46.
23 Caesars Palace press kit.
24 Sarno quoted in Barrows (1994), 12.
25 Hughes quoted in Hess (1993), 88–9.
26 Like the movie palaces, Caesars democratized luxury and the experiences associated with the lifestyles of rich and famous elites, real or fictional. According to architect George Ramp, the movie palaces were "shrines to democracy;" and Lloyd Lewis agreed, saying: "The royal favor of democracy it is: for in the 'de luxe' house every man is a king and every woman a queen." Ramp and Lewis quoted in Nasaw (1993), 230; 239.
27 Lears (1994) documents this change as it was displayed in changes in advertisements on 1–133; and (1983), 1–38.
28 Aram Stepanian in Caesars Palace press kit.
29 M. Wood (1975), 167–73. Wood notes the pure excess expended in the production of the epics, which he calls "a ritual expression of lack of need;" something which he sees as part of the American way of life: "the planned prodigality, spectacular waste, waste as a way of life: glass skyscrapers and cars that give you 7 miles to the gallon" Ibid., 180–1.
30 Melvin Simon & Associates of Indianapolis and the Gordon Company of Los Angeles were the financial backers of the venture.
31 Betsky quoted in A. H. Huxtable, "Living with the fake, and liking it," *New York Times* (March 30, 1997): 40.
32 Hess (1993), 108–9, briefly discusses and compares the "archaeologically correct" classicism of Caesars in the late 1980s with the more stylized classicism of the 1960s.
33 Dougall and Head quoted in Sicard (1993), no pagination.
34 Ibid.
35 Dougall quoted in Thome (1992), 7.
36 Dougall quoted in Sicard (1993), no pagination.
37 Dougall and Head quoted in Fine (1993), 24.
38 Thome (1992), 8. The same firm that designed the *E.T.* ride at Universal Studios designed the animatronics of the Festival Fountain, providing an example of the increasing merging of the entertainment industries.
39 Sicard (1993), no pagination.
40 Jencks (5th rev. enl. edition, 1987), esp. 130–1.
41 As Rugoff (1995) has pointed out, the fantasy environments of Las Vegas themed resorts also make no serious attempt to reproduce reality; instead they "freely celebrate their fraudulence" in a "burlesque of purity." (1995), 5. It is this celebration of fraudulence that makes it easier for us to accept and feel comfortable with the excess. Las Vegas would be a lot more disconcerting if it did not cloak its excess in parody.
42 Boyer (1992) makes this point about historic city tableaux and urban revivals such as Manhattan's South Street Seaport that are designed explicitly for escape and gratification. "These tableaux separate pleasure from necessity, escape from reality . . . [and] promise not to burden the spectator with the seriousness of reality." (1992), 190.
43 Sorkin (1992), 208, makes this point about Disneyland (which he calls "the alpha point of hyperreality").

44 Wynn quoted in Anderson (1994), 48.
45 Imagineers quoted in M. Wallace (1996), 35–6.
46 Ibid.
47 Abrams (1991), 50.
48 Sorkin (1992), 216.
49 *Seven* (1986), 12.
50 Zukin (1991), 50–3, discusses the trend in retail for lavishly orchestrated promotions celebrating designs from history, current films, and regions of the world.
51 Cohen (2003) tracks and analyzes how and why this came about.
52 Silverman (1986).
53 Ibid., 21–4.
54 Ibid., 78–81.
55 For the Chinese exhibition, see Silverman (1986), 29–39, and for the French Exhibition, 55–66.
56 Ibid., 57.
57 Ibid., x. Silverman's study also shows the correspondence between the political program of the Reagan White House and the emergence of an aristocratic consumer culture at Bloomingdale's and the Metropolitan Museum. "The idealization of non-American nobilities provided the elements of a new cultural style concordant with the politics born at the first Reagan inauguration: a style aggressively dedicated to the cult of visible wealth and distinction . . . a style of unabashed opulence, whose mixture of hedonism, spitefulness, and social repudiation was captured in the slogan 'Living well is the best revenge.'" Ibid., 11.
58 For an analysis of McCullough's novels, see M. A. Malamud (2001), 209–28.
59 Rosaldo (1989), 107; Rushdie (1991).
60 Jameson (1984) has suggested that we look to postmodern culture for a cognitive map of the changing economic landscape, and he identified the style of postmodernism with contemporary, multinational capitalism. (1984), 53–93, esp. 89–92; cf. Zukin (1991), 25 and 50–3. See also Boyer (1994); the collection of essays in Sorkin (1992); M. Davis (1990); and Cohen (2003).
61 According to Michael Sorkin (1992), the theme park embodies much of what threatens the democratic public realm: "This is the meaning of the theme park, the place that embodies it all, the ageographia [sic], the surveillance and control, the simulations without end. The theme park presents its happy regulated vision of pleasure – all those artfully hoodwinking forms – as a substitute for the democratic public realm. . . . In the 'public' spaces of the theme park or the shopping mall, speech is restricted: there are no demonstrations in Disneyland" (1992), xv. See also Cohen's (2003) discussion of the privatization of public space and how its disappearance threatens the shared public sphere on which democracy depends, esp. 274–89.
62 *Seven* (1986), 13.
63 When discussing industrial capitalism in his manifesto, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord noted: "When economic necessity is replaced by the necessity for boundless economic development, the satisfaction of primary human needs is replaced by an uninterrupted fabrication of pseudo-needs." Debord also stated: "where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles" and that in such societies "the real consumer becomes a consumer of illusions." Debord (1967, rpt. 1973), Thesis 1, 47, and 51.

64 Not only in Las Vegas: Boyer (1992) describes the behavior of the public at historic preservations and urban revivals such as Manhattan's South Street Seaport or Boston's Quincy Market: "these sites become culinary and ornamental landscapes through which the tourists – the new public of the late twentieth century – graze, celebrating the consumption of place and architecture, and the taste of history and food." She criticizes the manipulation of desire and history to encourage consumerism at urban historic tableaux: "The private sphere of nostalgic desires and imagination is increasingly manipulated by stage sets and city tableaux set up to stimulate our acts of consumption, by the spectacle of history made false." (1992), 189 and 204.

Epilogue

Knowledge of Roman history declined over the course of the twentieth century and Americans now know much less about ancient Rome than did their forebears. Children no longer read edifying tales of Roman heroism in their school texts, nor can labor union leaders evoke the reforms of the Gracchi or the slave revolt led by Spartacus to fire up the crowds at conventions and rallies. The experience of ancient Rome now available to most Americans comes from popular culture in its diverse commercial manifestations – television programs, historical novels and plays, comic books and toys, advertising and computer games, and, above all, film. Knowledge of ancient Rome – and early American history – may be hazier than it once was but the narrative of the rise and fall of Rome continues to haunt the American imagination. There remains a lingering anxiety that the linear and progressive historical trajectory that linked democracy, capitalism, and Christianity in a vision of a divinely guided nation may not be true and that the United States today remains susceptible to a cycle of decline and fall of the sort that Thomas Cole painted. The myth of a virtuous republic undermined by the corruption of a decadent empire continues to permeate popular culture's Rome, as is evident in the blockbuster film *Gladiator* (2000), and to support some pointed political commentary by Senator Robert C. Byrd and political commentator Gore Vidal.

Virtuous Republic or Corrupt Empire?

> The movie is about us. It's not just about Rome, it's about America.
>
> Screenwriter David Franzoni on *Gladiator*[1]

Gladiator is an allegory of and a commentary on America c.2000.[2] Ridley Scott's film employs the imagery of the rise and fall of Rome and rewrites Roman history as a way of commenting on the United States at the millennium. It is, Herbert Muschamp has written, "a meditation on the perplexity of the world's

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sole surviving superpower."[3] In Ridley Scott's Rome of the late second century CE, as in America in the year 2000, there are no external enemies left to conquer. Like Anthony Mann's *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964), the film on which *Gladiator* relies most, the enemy is internal: the Roman Empire is oppressing its Republican self. The narrative tension in Scott's epic is the internal battle between a virtuous republic and a corrupt empire: which will prevail?

That the true Republican self is embodied in a cynical, bitter, and disillusioned soldier from the hinterlands is telling. Maximus is no starry-eyed Luke Skywalker. Nor does he seek fame or glory. Maximus is a hero in the Bruce Willis mold; he is not a superhero, he is your slightly-better-than-average man responding exceptionally to exceptional times. At the beginning of the film he is a man doing his job, putting in his hours fighting for the empire, desiring only to return home to his wife and son in Spain. He is a loyal citizen-farmer who fights for Rome but longs for his fields. Maximus has never questioned whether the Roman Empire is a good or a bad thing. He accepts that Rome is a conquering power and is a civilizing force in a brutal and savage world ("the rest is darkness," he says). So when the Emperor Marcus Aurelius reveals to him his doubts about Rome's perpetual warfare and questions its benefits, Maximus would rather not hear. And when Marcus Aurelius chooses Maximus over his own son, Commodus, as the person best fit to restore the Republic saying: "I want you to become the protector of Rome after I die. I will empower you, to one end alone, to give power back to the people of Rome and end the corruption that has crippled it," Maximus is stunned. He would prefer to return home to his family on his Spanish estate but he is soon forced to face the darkness that Rome has become.

Commodus kills Marcus Aurelius when he learns that his father prefers Maximus and plans to entrust the empire to him. Commodus then orders that Maximus and his family be killed. Maximus escapes and flees home to Spain, arriving to find his wife and son dead. Lying prostrate with grief, he is abducted by slavers, who take him to Zucchabar in the Roman province of Mauretania (Algeria), where he is sold to Proximo, a trainer of gladiators. The death of his wife and son turns Maximus into a killing-machine bent on revenge for the loss of his family and for the death of father-figure Marcus Aurelius. He becomes a star gladiator and ends up performing in Rome, where he eventually kills Commodus in a gladiatorial contest before himself dying of a wound that Commodus inflicted before they entered the arena. Just before he dies, he instructs his former lieutenant: "Quintus, free my men. Senator Gracchus is to be reinstated. There was once a dream that was Rome" – a leitmotif of the film – "it shall be realized. These are the wishes of Marcus Aurelius." Maximus then dies and joins his family in a heavenly version of his Spanish estate.

In the opening of the film, Maximus runs his hand through rippling wheat in late summer just before harvest, an image that reoccurs several times. His voice chokes with emotion when he describes his land and family to the Emperor Marcus Aurelius. He offers prayers to his ancestors before going to bed. The images of

fields of rippling wheat, rural home life, loving wife and son, and service for the greater good simultaneously evoke the lost American Dream and the Jeffersonian vision of the yeoman republic. Maximus is a family man, a good and pious soldier-citizen-farmer. Shockingly, Maximus' domestic refuge is brutally destroyed by imperial politics. The problem is corruption and power politics, which destroy the life of the honest average man. After the killing of Marcus Aurelius and the murder of his wife and son, Maximus is alienated from the public political sphere. Its corruption has led to the death of his family and the end of his faith and belief in Rome. He graphically expresses his alienation and disillusionment with Rome and its politics when he excises from his skin with a knife the insignia of the legions: SPQR (*senatus populusque romanus*, "the Senate and people of Rome"). Initially, he has no desire to go to the cesspool that is Rome and restore the republic. Like Ben-Hur, it is desire for revenge that motivates him.

Bad government is embodied in the Emperor Commodus. Although the Roman Senate is corrupt we see little dramatization on screen of its corruption; evil actions are perpetrated by the decadent and twisted Commodus. As for the rest of the citizens of Rome, they feature merely as a cheering mob in the Roman arena. The battle between the virtuous Republic and the decadent empire is played out as a battle between Maximus and Commodus. Maximus embodies conservative family values and rural utopianism; Commodus stands for the decadence and corruption of the metropolis.

At the end of Anthony Mann's *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, Livius (the Maximus character) and Lucilla, his beloved, walk away from the corruption of the empire. Livius refuses the imperial title; he sees Rome is irretrievably corrupt. As they walk away, we hear the office of emperor is being sold to the highest bidder in the plutocracy that Rome has become. In Mann's film the voiceover is "A great civilization is not destroyed from without until it has destroyed itself from within." In *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, Rome is an irredeemable polity. In contrast to this gloomy end, *Gladiator* offers the possibility of the restoration of good government through Maximus' sacrificial intervention. *Gladiator* ends with Maximus giving his life to fulfill the wish of Marcus Aurelius that he restore the Roman Republic. The intervention of a good man, it seems, can halt the process of political decay. It is the intervention of a white heroic male – the gritty, self-assured, yet also civilized, sensitive, and home-loving image of the modern, all-American hero transposed to the Roman Empire – that holds open the possibility of reversing the process of decline and fall. Capitalizing on the appeal of conservative republican values and the dream of a restoration of a virtuous republic, the film commodifies the deeply ingrained linkage of the fates of ancient Rome and modern America.

Will the republic be restored? The responsibility for its regeneration is in the hands of the Senate and the film implies that Senator Gracchus, whose name recalls the wily senator popular with the Roman masses in Kirk Douglas's *Spartacus* and, ultimately, the Roman tribunes Tiberius Gracchus and Caius Gracchus, might take

the lead in its restoration. The film ends with the image of dawn rising above that symbol of Roman decadence and cruelty, the Colosseum. Arthur Pomeroy has commented that, in contrast to the voiceover at the end of Mann's film, we might almost expect a voiceover in *Gladiator's* last scene to tell us: "It's morning again in the Roman Empire," recalling the sunny optimism of Ronald Reagan's 1984 re-election campaign: "It's morning in America."[4] The historical truth is that the real Roman Republic was not restored after the death of Commodus. *Gladiator* is, of course, consumable fantasy, not political reality. When we return to the realm of politics and listen to what Senator Robert C. Byrd and author Gore Vidal have to say about the state of the American nation we find a darker view. According to these men, America has indeed repeated Rome's slide into political corruption and imperial overreach.

A New Caesar?

In 2002, *Harper's Magazine* editor Lewis H. Lapham, his words dripping with sarcasm, hailed President George W. Bush as Caesar:

> Our President is a Great General; he will blast Saddam Hussein and rescue us from doom. To achieve this extraordinary mission he needs extraordinary powers, so extraordinary that they don't exist in law. The barbarians are at the gates, but our general is all-knowing, and he sees what we cannot. Great is Caesar; God must be with him, "Hail Caesar!"[5]

Since the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 comparisons between Roman and American imperialism and discussions of the "imperial presidency" have proliferated in newspapers, editorials, and books.[6] Not only in cartoons but also in newspaper and magazine articles and editorials President Bush has been compared to King George III, Julius Caesar, Nero, and even Darth Vader.[7] We seem to have come full circle. We opened the book with the Revolutionary generation comparing King George III to Caesar. Now, critics of President Bush accuse him of ruling like a Caesar.

Senator Byrd has been warning about the increasing power of the executive branch of government and the dangers of the American Senate repeating Rome's trajectory for years. But his speeches since 9/11/2001 have reached new oratorical heights. They are full of passion and dire prognostications on the health of the Senate and the American republic at large. Senator Byrd was one of the few senators who voted against the War Authorization Bill giving the president virtually unlimited authority to make pre-emptive war on Iraq. According to Byrd, the Senate really "lost its way" when it passed the bill on October 11, 2002, in direct contravention of the intent of the "forefathers." Byrd urged delaying on voting on the war resolution President Bush sent to Capitol Hill, citing the Gulf

of Tonkin Resolution and the resulting quagmire in Vietnam as a reminder of the results of handing over war power to a president. "We were treading here on far-reaching and dangerous ground, I said; why not slow the process down?"[8] But there was hardly any debate in the Senate. Instead, there was a stampede to give the president what he wanted. "The framers would have been really disturbed if they'd have been here," Byrd claimed."[9] Byrd regrets the loss of civic virtue among senators. They have "lost this quality of pride and dedication – to something that's higher than politics, than Bush being elected and re-elected – the higher goal of service to the nation, the recognition of the Senate's place [as] the bedrock of the constitutional system."[10] Senator Byrd finds the decline of the Senate deeply disturbing: "Having revered the Senate during my service for more than forty years, I was never pained so much," he lamented after the Senate passed the War Authorization Bill.[11]

In 2002 Senator Byrd spent weeks controlling the floor of the Senate for many hours at a time, criticizing President Bush's proposal to create a Homeland Security Department. He was troubled because the plan was devised in secret by aides to the president with no input from members of Congress. Senator Byrd was also concerned that the Bush administration intended to protect many of the department's activities from public and congressional scrutiny. As his colleagues rushed to give the president a domestic security bill, Senator Byrd reached back to Roman history to chide them for their spineless compliance with a president and an administration he views as usurping power from Congress. The senator took the floor to inform them of a "truly great" Roman senator from the first century CE named Helvidius Priscus. One day, said Byrd, the Roman senator was met outside the Senate by the Emperor Vespasian, who threatened to execute him if he spoke too freely. "And so both did their parts," Mr. Byrd said. "Helvidius Priscus spoke his mind; the Emperor Vespasian killed him. In this effeminate age it is instructive to read of courage. There are members of the U.S. Senate and House who are terrified, apparently, if the president of the United States tells them, urges them, to vote a certain way that may be against their belief."[12] Senator Byrd is not one of them: "Our founding fathers struggled to escape the heavy yoke of one King George. We must not submit to the dictates of another. As Brutus said to Cicero, when Cicero was attempting to toady-up to Antony, our ancestors would have scorned even a gentle master. We are at a dangerous time in our republic."[13]

Senator Byrd has long connected himself to the tradition of anti-Caesar rhetoric in the US Senate. In his criticism of the line-item veto, he brought up Senator Henry Clay's accusation in 1832 that President Andrew Jackson's use of the veto was transforming the presidency into an elective monarchy.[14] Now, as the warning above indicates, he sees President Bush as the new Caesar.[15] In response to the expansive powers President Bush and his administration have claimed for the presidency since 9/11, Senator Byrd has adopted the mantle of the Roman senators Cicero or Helvidius Priscus who he believes courageously defended the Roman Senate from Caesarism. Senator Byrd has told his colleagues on the Senate

floor, "I have often felt, in recent days, as if this eighty-four-year-old man is the only thing standing between a White House hungry for power and the safeguards in the Constitution. That is not bragging; that is lamenting."[16]

Best-selling author and political commentator Gore Vidal feels equally embattled. In 2002, Mark Cooper of the *LA Weekly* interviewed him on the state of the American nation. "You call yourself one of the last defenders of the American Republic against the American Empire," said Cooper. "Do you have any allies left?" "I sometimes feel like I am the last defender of the republic," Vidal replied. According to him, the election of 2000 was "the end of the republic," and the events since 9/11 have accelerated the process of decline and fall.[17] Like Senator Byrd, Vidal asserts that the American Senate has become as corrupt and supine to the president as the Roman Senate was to the wishes of the emperor:

> When the admirable Tiberius (he has had an undeserved bad press), upon becoming emperor, received a message from the Senate in which the conscript fathers assured him that whatever legislation he wanted would be automatically passed by them, he sent back word that this was outrageous. "Suppose the emperor is ill or mad or incompetent?" He returned their message. They sent it again. His response: "How eager you are to be slaves." I often think of that wise emperor when I hear Republican members of Congress extolling the wisdom of Bush.[18]

Gore Vidal, the Henry Adams of our age, has long been fascinated by Roman history and American history, and in his writing he has often compared American political corruption with Rome's decline and fall. Vidal's political views have been shaped by rational Enlightenment optimism. He admires the Revolutionary generation, though he is not blind to their faults. In his 2003 book on the Founding Fathers, *Inventing a Nation: Washington, Adams, Jefferson*, he quotes at length Benjamin Franklin's views on the likelihood of the Constitution and the American experiment succeeding or not.

> I agree to this Constitution with all its faults, if they are such: because I think a General Government necessary for us, and there is no *Form* of Government but what may be a Blessing to the People if well-administered; and I believe farther that this is likely to be well administered for a Course of Years and can only end in Despotism as other Forms have done before it, when the People shall become so corrupted as to need Despotic Government, being incapable of any other.[19]

Vidal believes that Franklin was prescient regarding the future of the republic. Franklin thought the Constitution would work for a space of years but then it would fail, as all such constitutions have in the past, because of the essential corruption of the people. When the people become corrupt, they will not want a republic. They will opt for despotism. Vidal believes this has happened. "Ours is a totally corrupt society. The presidency is for sale. . . . the corruption predicted by Franklin bears its terrible fruit. No one wants to do anything about it."[20] "Our

form of democracy," he says, "is bribery, on the highest scale. It's far worse than anything that occurred in the Roman Empire, until the Praetorian Guard started to sell the principate."[21]

In November 2006, the Republicans lost control of both the Senate and the House of Representatives, in mid-term elections that were widely seen as a referendum on President Bush's handling of the Iraq War. When, just a few weeks later, the Bush administration seemed to refute this expression of the will of the people, by announcing plans to increase troop numbers in Iraq, the *New Yorker* magazine responded on its January 22, 2007, cover: Bush was pictured dressed as the Emperor Nero fiddling while Rome burns. Rome continues to play its malleable role in the articulation of American politics and culture today.

Notes

1 Franzoni quoted in Soriano (2001).

2 Cyrino (2004), 124–49; Pomeroy (2004), 111–23; and Rose (2004), 150–72 have been helpful to me. I have also benefited from Albu (2008).

3 H. Muschamp, "Throwing our anxieties to the lions," *New York Times* (April 30, 2000): sec. 2A, 1 and 33, at 1.

4 Pomeroy (2004), 122.

5 Lapham (2002), 9.

6 The term "imperial presidency" was coined by Arthur Schlesinger in 1973 to refer to the presidency of Richard Nixon, which, in his view, had usurped important powers given by the Constitution to Congress. Some recent books that discuss America as a modern Roman Empire include Bacevich (2002); Byrd (2004b); N. Ferguson (2004); Johnson (2004); Maier (2006); and Murphy (2007). The most important articles on this topic have been conveniently collected under the heading "Militarized globalism and empire – advocates, skeptics, and critics" at www.comw.org/qdr/empire.html, a web page sponsored by the Project on Defense Alternatives.

7 On President Bush as Julius Caesar, see Wyke's analysis (2006b), 305–23. For President Bush as King George III: "In 1776 Americans issued their declaration of independence. They demanded a new form of government in place of the 'repeated injuries and usurpations' to which they had been subjected. In the long list of grievances that followed, the first was that King George had 'refused his assent to laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.' That suddenly has a contemporary ring. Now, as then, America's problem is a usurping king called George." M. Kettle, "America's problem is again a usurping king called George," *Guardian* (June 17, 2006): 31. Kettle is referring to the claim that the president has the power to set aside any statute that conflicts with his own interpretation of the Constitution, and to his introduction of the "signing statement," a presidential pronouncement setting out the terms in which he intends to interpret a new law. On Bush as Darth Vader: when the final film of the *Star Wars* series, *Revenge of the Sith* (the story of Anakin Skywalker's fall to the dark side and the rise of an emperor through warmongering), was released in 2005 some audiences made blunt comparisons between the film and President Bush's

War on Terror and the invasion of Iraq. Two lines from the movie especially resonated: "This is how liberty dies. With thunderous applause," moans Padme Amidala as the galactic Senate cheers dictator-in-waiting Palpatine and grants him sweeping new powers as he announces a crusade against the Jedi. Similarly, in response to President Bush's warmongering, the American Senate granted him the authority in 2002 to wage pre-emptive war in Iraq. In the second line, Anakin (soon to become villain Darth Vader) tells former mentor Obi-Wan Kenobi "If you're not with me, then you're my enemy," echoing Mr. Bush's international ultimatum after the September 11 attacks, "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." D. Froomkin, "The empire strikes Bush," *Special to washingtonpost.com* and *Associated Press*, Cannes, France (May 16, 2005).

8 Baker (2004), 6.

9 "[This] pernicious doctrine of preemption cannot be constitutional because the framers thought it was wise to put the making of war and the declaring of war in different hands," he said. "Therefore, they put the power to declare war . . . in the Congress, so that such a momentous decision could not be by one man but by many. We placed the declaring of war in the hands of one individual. Out of 275 million, one man was to declare war." Senator Byrd quoted in J. R. MacArthur, "Looking at Iraq," *Providence Journal* (November 4, 2003).

10 Ibid.

11 Baker (2004), 7.

12 J. Tierney, "Threats and responses: The Senate; Byrd, at 85, fills the Forum with Romans and wrath," *New York Times* (November 19, 2002): sect. A, col. 4, at 1. Tacitus, Dio Cassius, Suetonius, and Pliny discuss the ardent republican Helvidius Priscus. Vespasian ordered his execution.

13 Goodman (2004).

14 Byrd (1995), 169, 172.

15 "I'm the commander. See, I don't have to explain why I say things . . . maybe somebody needs to explain to me why they say something, but I don't feel like I owe anyone an explanation," President Bush has notoriously said. "If this were a dictatorship, it'd be a heck of a lot easier. Just as long as I'm the dictator." Bush quoted in R. Reeves, "Bush is taking Saddam and Kim too personally," *Universal Press Syndicate* (January 17, 2003).

16 S. Fritz, "Senator Byrd learns from, shapes history," *St. Petersburg Times* (September 23, 2002), 3A.

17 M. Cooper (2002).

18 Vidal (2006).

19 Vidal (2003), 30–1.

20 "It's not even a campaign issue. Once you have a business community that is so corrupt in a society whose business is business, then what you have is, indeed, despotism. It is the sort of authoritarian rule that the Bush people have given us." Vidal quoted in Cooper (2003).

21 Vidal quoted in interview by Hari (2001), 19.

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